

Feminisms, Publics, and Rhetorical Indirections: Figuring Marcet Haldeman-Julius, Anita Loos,
and Mae West, 1905-1930

By

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Abstract

This work seeks to establish indirect feminist rhetoric, rhetoric that denies, elides, parodies, or co-opts its perceived exigencies, within the emergence of spectacular technologies of writing in the early 20th century, technologies that included personality journalism, scenario and screenwriting, and writing for the Broadway stage between roughly 1905 and 1930. Following the work of a cohort of indirect feminist rhetors, Marcet Haldeman-Julius, Anita Loos, and Mae West, all of whom, in different ways, wrote feminist critiques of the powerful and sometimes abusive men in their lives, often while these men functioned as the very gatekeepers to the audiences sought by these women, this dissertation challenges traditional notions that effective rhetoric takes place out in the open, with the free exchange of propositions, offering that sometimes the proliferation of rhetoric and critique is more useful in situations that circumvent the potential for reciprocal postulations, functioning counter- or even non-propositionally. Finally, in their approach to feminist critique, these indirect feminist rhetors – both in content and in style – challenge traditional feminist historiographies of what public women could say and be heard saying in the years leading up to and immediately following suffrage. In those ways, this study merges questions of rhetoric, gender, history, writing, and technology that lay the groundwork for scholars participating in the ongoing discussions of writing, rhetoric, and embodiment in digital worlds.

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Chapter 1

Introduction: Isolating Feminist Rhetorical Indirection – A Few Coincidences Regarding Women, Spectacle, and What Can't Be Said (or Heard)

Why do any of us act and speak in ways that entail social cost when we could do otherwise? – Barry Brummett, *A Rhetoric of Style*

Feminism and indirect rhetoric are not comfortable bedfellows, neither wanting to be caught *in delecte flagrante*. Indirect rhetoric, rhetoric that denies, parodies, subverts, co-opts, or otherwise underplays or misdirects its own purpose (not to mention the potential for a counter-statement) is a means of writing or speaking that, though it may attend to matters of consciousness-raising, fails – by definition – to follow through with the most fundamental aspect of ancient and modern rhetoric: it circumvents the sphere of rational-critical debate, undermines the free exchange of propositions, and forecloses upon all but a few aspects of the spectrum for response. These two are strange bedfellows because feminism from its inception was a political movement that first generally and then specifically advocated for the private and public equality of women. Rhetoric, as coined by Plato “was constituted as the opposite of philosophy,” though both are understood as taking place out in the open amid the free exchange of propositions (Campbell “Consciousness” 49). Indirect feminist rhetoric, however, does the opposite: it functions as a counterpropositional discourse, one that attempts to raise the consciousness of audiences (or selected sections of audiences) while structurally denying the potential for a counter-proposition from the subject of that critique. In this study, those counterpropositional, discursive critiques are aimed at taking the air out of the atmosphere of rational-critical debate, especially when its rules are dictated by patriarchic presumption—that is, male voices cannot

trivialize, cannot suppress, and cannot *answer* the critique without jeopardizing their own *ethos*.

This slyly subversive rhetorical method is particularly present in U.S. popular culture in the 1920s, a culture brimming with irony, humor, and Freudian anxieties about what lies beneath the surface of language.

Locating Indirect Feminist Rhetoric

Indirect feminist rhetoric, at least as it is embodied by the subjects of this study, Marcet Haldeman-Julius (1887-1941), Anita Loos (1888-1981), and Mae West (1893-1980), stands apart from traditional modalities of feminist rhetoric and feminist historiography, insofar as it entails a rejection of identity politics – a central tenet of feminism in the first and second waves – and embraces *performances of identity* as potential strategies for situational female empowerment.

Indirection, in the cases investigated here, is a function of celebrity, with these women operating as “known commodities.” Hence, audiences anticipated taking them lightly. These women, a personality-journalist, a screenwriter, and a playwright, were merely expected to entertain, and that expectation colored the delivery methods of their critiques of male power and gender inequality. Their very public-ness shrouded them in the camouflage of audience expectation, allowing them to get away with sometimes scathing critiques, as long as they played them off as jokes. As Freud writes in *Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious*, jokes can sometimes be the most effective method of truth-telling, not to mention an effective way of garnering an audience *for* that truth-telling. Reading these women as indirect feminist rhetors is a conscious scholarly choice, and the effect of this reading is that these women are transplanted from the middling terrain of popular entertainment to the subversive space of proto-third-wave

feminists in the 1920s.¹ Of course, though, they existed in both spaces simultaneously. The very implicational nature of their critique, as well, served as a way to maintain their varying degrees and modalities of celebrity status, all the while allowing them the exceptional capability of pressing feminism beyond the borders of identity into the realm of the performative.

The degree to which each performs feminism is incremental, moving from lower to higher levels of abstraction, with Haldeman-Julius playing the good wife, Loos playing the selfless star-maker and intellectual apprentice, and West playing West – an experiment in which the façade and the reality almost merge into complete, seamless, spectacle. All these spaces *use* identity toward the ends of female empowerment; they hold men accountable for personal and social traumas inflicted, and they manage to keep their audiences (laughing) while they do so. Studying them in this light is a significant break from the feminist rhetorical tradition, though considering the extent to which contemporary culture is spectacularized (where Angelina Jolie can go from playing videogame character Lara Croft to distributing aid with Kofi Annan), studying women rhetors like these makes good sense.

Research into women's rhetorical strategies has not remained static in the academy; it is, rather like the feminist rhetorics of this cohort, developmental. In the past, as Carol Mattingly explains, “feminist research addressed recovery primarily” (99). This type of work, early on, suffered accusations of privileging individualism and ignoring the collective element of feminist resistance, reinscribing a sexist orientation toward individualist ideologies by “validating token women” (100). This emphasis on particular, exceptional women led early feminist scholars to

¹ Doubtlessly, this assignation carries an odor of presentism, which I argue is necessary in this work for challenging and reshaping traditional feminist historiographies of the 1920s where forward-thinking women were often relegated to one side or the other of the flapper/suffragette binary. These women, I argue, found a third way, one that plays with identity-politics through the modalities of textual performance; they, perhaps, would not have known or accepted what they were doing as feminist (within the limited feminist lexicons of their day), but it is my belief that it was indeed – and radically so.

elevate particular examples of feminism above others – particularly leaders like Elizabeth Cady Stanton or Susan B. Anthony. This approach, critics warned, “promoted a presumption that few women were rhetorically active in nineteenth-century America” (102), a presumption that led scholars to focus on leaders of feminist organizations, from the NWSA to the WCTU, and to ignore other types of feminists. Though focusing on individual women, this dissertation is an attempt to expand the conversation of what counts as feminist rhetoric – indeed what counts as feminism – not to limit it.

In that regard, this project locates itself within the tradition of the work of Cheryl Glenn, Susan Jarratt, Rory Ong, Patricia Bizzell, Gesa Kirsch, and Jacqueline Jones Royster (among many others), who, in the 1990s, challenged traditional notions of what counted as historical rhetorical evidence, preferring to venture into uncharted territory, spaces of silence, spaces of fragmentary or nonexistent primary source material, spaces that demanded an interpretational, risk-taking commitment to their subjects and a public acknowledgement of primacy of the writer’s own choices and point of view. Treatments of traditionally fragmentary subjects such as Aspasia, Sappho, Sojourner Truth, and the Sophists stimulated a new orientation to historical rhetorics. Jarratt’s work on the Sophists, for instance, lays important groundwork for this study in her close attention to the performance backgrounds of sophistic rhetoric. In *Rereading the Sophists*, Jarratt explains,

If this experience of public performance was commonplace in the eighth, seventh, and sixth centuries, the tendency for fifth-century rhetoricians to seek pleasurable effects in their new prose derives from a well-established tradition rather than representing an innovation or manipulation. (34)

This project's emphasis on the celebrity and spectacular performance of indirect feminist rhetoric comes from a post-third-wave, post-identity politics position regarding both the packaging and distribution of feminist critiques. Feminist scholars like Glenn, Mattingly, and Jarratt have gone a great distance toward making this kind of study possible in their recognitions that, historically, when "traditional tools of rhetoric were denied them, women found it necessary to consider techniques beyond masculine speakers' attention to argument and delivery, techniques equally important in rhetorical effectiveness" (Mattingly 105). Haldeman-Julius, Loos, and West were not denied the traditional tools of rhetoric; *they invented their own because the rise of celebrity and the technologies of spectacle allowed them to convert and subvert, as long as they remained covert.*

As Jarratt reminds us, these alternative approaches to feminist rhetoric of the last two decades have been presented in numerous productive ways, from Page duBois's discussions of "metarhetoric," to Krista Ratcliffe's explanations of women's "rhetorical activities," from Joy Ritchie and Kate Ronald's attention to women's "available means" to Cheryl Glenn's analysis of Sappho's "protorhetoric" ("Sappho" 12). While fundamentally changing the research and interpretative historical landscape of women's rhetoric, these approaches all consider – to varying degrees – women's rhetorical enterprises as being limited or constrained by the "available means" of their gender-roles, of their identity-categories; to a certain degree, at least in terms of how they constructed their own celebrity, this trio's rhetorical potential was constrained by the necessity to keep the audiences coming back through the humorous or performative envelopes into which their gendered critique was folded. Importantly, then, Campbell, Glenn, Jarratt, Lunsford, Swearingen, duBois, Kirsch, Royster, and Wertheimer

carved out particular spaces that challenged both what women could publicly say and do *and* how scholars could talk about their rhetorical activities.

This rich and exciting work in women's history, rhetoric, and historiography has both laid the groundwork *for* the current study and, to an extent, is interrogated *by* it. All these challenges to research, interpretation, rhetorical means, and women's agency, whether in ancient or modern contexts, draw upon the notion that feminist rhetors are engaged in a fundamentally politico-propositional discursive space. As Hui Wu explains,

feminist inquiry is linked avowedly to a political concern, that is, to “denounce sexism and discrimination against women, to expose the origins, foundations, and workings of patriarchy, and subsequently to formulate and implement strategies for its eventual demolition” (Kelly-Gadol 15). (85)

While uncovering the political and social conditions that motivated women to throw off the yoke of patriarchy remains extraordinarily important, this dissertation attempts to fill the space that strict attention to propositional rhetoric has left vacant. Feminism is political, but it need not speak that way. It is time, I propose, to turn our scholarly ears toward women we only half-listened to before, paying attention to more than whether we are entertained.

This dissertation explores rhetorical operations created by women in the spaces around politicization, outside contexts in which traditional political propositions about women's roles circulate. The women in this study, though, do not operate out of scarcity models of available means but rather spaces of overdetermination. These women, all masters of particular technologies of writing (personality journalism, early scenario and screenwriting, writing for the stage) chose not to exchange propositions in the public sphere (which is both bourgeois and necessarily masculinized) and thus chose to operate in spaces that violate the long held principle

that underlies both feminism and rhetoric – namely that “*if rhetoric is to serve the public good, it must involve the reciprocal exchange of ideas in a charitable context*”² (Couture and Kent 9).

These indirect feminist rhetorics take place in heavily mediated technological, generic, ironic, parodic, or co-optive spaces and function counterpropositionally, denying the objects of their critique the potential for counter-response. Making the necessary adjustment in the populations studied, these indirect feminist rhetors operate in spaces, as James C. Scott indicates, “outside the intimidating force of power,” spaces in which a radical (and radically strange) “dissonant political culture is possible,” a “politics of disguise and anonymity,” of “double meaning,” of “[r]umor, gossip, folktales, jokes, songs, rituals, codes, and euphemisms” (18-19).

These indirect critiques operate outside discourses built upon political propositions, outside audiences equipped with prearticulated agendas, but they still, like a dog-whistle, have the potential to raise the consciousness of subsections of audiences, those somehow prepared to hear the oblique message dressed in the language of ritualized, gendered, deferential behavior. This rhetorical technique invokes subsets of audiences, potential counterpublics, game for or capable of the necessary decoding of messages involved in making sense of indirect feminist critique. Paying attention to this unique species of messages still involves recognizing the genus of operation: feminist consciousness-raising as a “discursive practice,” (Campbell “Consciousness” 45). This feminist philosophy, as Karlyn Kohrs Campell explains, challenges the dichotomies of reason and passion, knowledge and feeling, body and mind that have been staples of traditional Western thought, dichotomies that define and reinforce gender and that, in turn, are reinforced by the stereotypes undergirding gender polarization. (“Consciousness” 49)

² Italics added.

Campbell explains that, traditionally, feminist rhetorical scholarship has included the “recovery and validation of elements that have been denigrated, elided, and omitted” (49), and thus it is with celebrities who function as closet-feminists, subverting identity and putting it to use. This project pays special attention to those moments when feminist rhetors themselves have purposefully elided, omitted, and toward the subversive ends of gendered critique, even rendered themselves as stereotypes by participating actively in genres, conversations, or even styles of writing that presupposed and worked within and alongside masculinist power structures, claims, and habits of mind and speech. This dissertation aims to look for places where feminist scholars have claimed to “embrace some symbolic functions while suppressing others” (Campbell “Consciousness” 49).

Though most of Campbell’s scholarship has functioned in the mode of rhetorical recovery, her dissertation on Jean Paul Sartre, she recalls, did something very different, “describing how a rhetorical theory could be extracted from works that did not purport to be rhetorical theory” (“Consciousness” 55), much like this present project, and it differs significantly from, to take an example, Cheryl Glenn’s work on Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe, and Anne Askew, which promotes “rhetoric as self-creation ... [as a] discourse through which identities emerge” (Campbell “Consciousness” 57). Not attempting anything as bold as tracing the emergence of identities, this dissertation has assumed, from the beginning, the development of critical agendas behind the façade of female celebrity identities in the 1920s. For Marcet Haldeman-Julius, Anita Loos, and Mae West, rhetoric (or at least rhetorical indirection) centered not on the elaboration of their own identities; rather, it circled around their varying and developmental critiques of masculine overreach, male power, or personal, gendered trauma.

Haldeman-Julius's, Loos's, and West's previously unseen brand of feminist rhetorical critique emerged as wildly different from its eighteenth and nineteenth century mother-feminisms, a critique wielded by women who, in most cases, did not wear their feminism on their sleeves but rather performed their gendered roles "adequately" to overcome or undermine gatekeepers in different types of media to attain access to the public, at which time, then, in coded ways,³ they unleashed critiques of masculinity taken from personal experiences of dominant, abusive, or absent husbands or from the experience of more institutional or even abstracted types of sexism or gendered discrimination. The nature of their indirect rhetoric depended on a potential spectacular audience awareness of standardized gendered limitations of public women, and the focus on these particular women attempts to "open up conversations about the history of rhetorical possibilities of mass communication" by targeting individuals and drawing attention to "important but overlooked social forms it has lighted upon" (Simonsen 3). What I will attempt to frame as indirect feminist rhetoric is indeed one of these long-repressed "social species of mass communication" not to mention of personal exigency that were "left behind" in the process both of the formulation of modern day rhetoric and mass communications but also by traditional feminist historiography (3).

Gendered Domination and Rewriting the Public Transcript

In *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, James C. Scott offers a helpful frame for tackling the subject of indirect rhetoric in the negotiation of what he calls the public transcript and the hidden transcript. "*Public*" here, Scott tells us, "refers to action that is openly avowed to the other party in the power relationship, and *transcript* is used almost in its juridical sense" as "a complete record of what was said" (2). Negotiations between dominant and subordinate groups

³ By coded, here, I mean that these women made use of the conditions of indirection inherent in the spectacle of mass media.

maintain both publicly available and veiled elements, the public record, in most cases, demonstrating performances of subordination by subgroups designed to appease elites and /or to draw attention away from associations and ideas that threaten the typical scripts of public power. That said, because the public transcript represents what Scott calls the self-portraits of elites, its truth-value is jeopardized by its assumption of hegemonic expectations of and consequent performances from subordinate groups. This is the story of the kindly master who believes – given the evidence of their public performances of submission and respect – that his slaves love and respect him. Of course, beside and behind the hegemonic public transcript, another one exists “offstage,” one that is much harder for scholars to access.

The hidden transcript is “derivative in the sense that it consists of those offstage speeches, gestures, and practices that confirm, contradict, or inflect what appears in the public transcript” (4). That said, it is virtually impossible to get hold of, as real performances of subordination typically do not come with their own “asides,” invitations into the backstage action, as those moves would threaten the legitimacy of subgroups’ hegemonic performances – performances that are meant to be believed. Though it is a helpful idea, the hidden transcript, in my view, is an analytic fantasy – if it does exist at all in 99 percent of cases, it is necessarily inaccessible, though Scott’s hope to look below “the placid surface that the public accommodation to the existing distribution of power, wealth, and status” is a noteworthy goal (15). In some ways, the scholar’s assumption that such a hidden transcript exists could be read as a colonizing move, particularly if it were viewed as a singular, monolithic text rather than a set of interrelated, contextually variable, and potentially incommensurate narratives that are “brought to light” in lieu of the scholar’s own normative, cultural, and professional agendas.

Nonetheless, “in the short run, it is in the interest of the subordinate to produce a more or less credible performance, speaking the lines and making the gestures he knows are expected of him,” and the more total and/or arbitrary the rule, the greater the expectation is that these maneuvers will be observable, recordable, part of the public transcript (3). Though Scott does not spend much time on it, presenting it as merely suggestive, another transcript exists, though, between the untrustworthy public transcript and the inaccessible hidden one, a transcript that is public (at least is not hidden) but that negotiates the public transcript in coded ways. Indirect feminist rhetoric, in my view, is but one example of this type of intermediary textual and rhetorical production. This tertiary entity is less a transcript than a meta-transcript, one that can appear in public while indirectly negating the power of hegemonic performances of subservience, an entity that suggests a negotiation of the public transcript as a form of “surveillance in power relations” (3), one “designed to be evasive” (19), one that encapsulates “a politics of anonymity that takes place in public view but is designed to have a double meaning or to shield the identity of the actors. ... [A] good part of the folk culture of subordinate groups – fit this description” (19). What each member of this cohort of indirect feminist rhetors represents in her public rhetoric is an ironic, parodic, or co-optational “portrait of dominant elites” that resists, however subtly, a full-on flattery (18), each of these representing a rhetorical move that denies or elides the rhetor’s critical agency. It is fully public, indeed a mass-communicative feminist critique that eschews the trickster figures rather than calling attention to them.

Without a doubt, Loos, Haldeman-Julius, and West were in many ways not, like the populations of slaves, peasants, and untouchables that Scott surveys, relegated to the strictest division between the public and hidden transcripts. They had access to mediatized public spaces and were partial creators of what Julie Hedgepeth Williams explains in her analysis of *Publick*

Occurrences, America's first newspaper (originally published in September of 1690), the "personification of society" (46). The populous took on a personality. This personification existed, too, in "[o]ther forms of media which followed the newspaper, such as radio and television," which also "developed that portrait-painting function, molding and sculpting it to fit their own styles and capabilities" (47). In short, as journalists, screenwriters, and playwrights, these were women with access to publics at a moment when the public sphere's permeability was at a high not seen since the rise of the bourgeois sphere documented by Jürgen Habermas (1968) and facilitated by the invention of the printing press in 1454 and the rise of the newspaper industry in the eighteenth century, with its consequent product the public intellectual. Habermas's analysis is a prolegomena of sorts to the early 20th century's proliferation of new publics through new technologies of production and reproduction. As Walter Benjamin explains,

It might be stated as a general formula that the technology of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the sphere of tradition. By replicating the work many times over, it substitutes a mass existence for a unique existence. And in permitting the reproduction to reach the recipient in his or her own situation, it actualizes that which is reproduced. (22)

Unlike Benjamin, though, who sees this reproduction-cycle as a "liquidation" of history and culture, I see the potential in these technologies to create rare but important critical spaces, spaces in which *new* culture thrives. In many important ways, Loos, Haldeman-Julius, and West operated in a public rhetorical space that was begging for an interruption by an intermediary discourse and intermediary rhetorical strategies that brought some concerns of the hidden transcript out in the open, albeit in "a wide variety of low-profile forms of resistance that dare not speak their name" (Scott 19). Just as "the earliest artworks originated in the service of rituals

– first magical, then religious,” this cohort of rhetors seeks to alter the public transcript in such a way as to disrupt rituals of gender and sex power, rerouting the circuits of gender power by means of mass reproductive technologies (Benjamin 24). They are, to riff on Benjamin a little, inserting authenticity into the very cycle of social reproduction, integrating critique into the machinery of social intercourse.

The conditions for these forms of resistance and their instantiation differ for all members of the Haldeman-Julius/Loos/West cohort, but they have in common that, despite the long-standing institutionalization of sexism, elements of personal, gendered domination and residue of traumas left by powerful men. “Although they are highly institutionalized,” Scott argues, “these forms of domination also have a strong element of personal rule ... the great latitude for arbitrary and capricious conduct by the master toward his slave, the lord to his serf, the Brahmin to his untouchable,” to which I would add the husband to his wife (21). Gendered domination, particularly within a marriage between gatekeepers and writers, differs vividly from Scott’s given scenarios but are, even for him, “suggestive” (22).

In the case of women, relations of subordination have typically been both more personal and more intimate; joint procreation and family life have meant that imagining an entirely separate existence for the subordinate group requires a more radical step than it has for serfs or slaves. Analogies become more strained in contemporary settings where choice of marriage partner is possible and where women have civil and political rights. (Scott 22)

Scott’s reservations here are wise, especially in relation to this cohort of rhetorical writers because of their status as modern women, women who have chosen their relationships with men, husbands, and the public.

In this case, indirect feminist rhetoric is not simply understandable in terms of an empowered/disempowered binary. That divorce is ostensibly possible, and that marital choices are voluntary does less harm to the analogy than it works to create a new analytic dimension. Here, the rhetor herself is implicated, somewhat, in the relationship of domination, often to the end of negotiating male intimates as gatekeepers of the public sphere. Hence, in this space – a space where domination and subordination still takes place, albeit in a very private and bounded geography – the appeal of indirect critique has both a didactic aim (the appeal to mass audiences) and a cathartic one. One thing that remains true in terms of Scott’s analysis, no matter how much his strict binaries are complicated by gender and modernity, is that the “greater the disparity in power between the dominant and subordinate and the more arbitrarily it is exercised,” the more the “public transcript of the subordinates will take on a stereotyped, ritualistic cast” (3). The closer they are to the gatekeepers, the more strictly monitored, from Haldeman-Julius to Loos to West, the greater the chance is that their indirect feminist critique will take on more and more stereotyped isomorphic tendencies. Husbands served as gatekeepers and dominant forces for all three women but at varying levels. These levels of control are manifest in how far each woman can push the boundary of gendered critique and by what means she uses to do so.

Indirect rhetoric *begins* with a betrayal of sorts (actually, several), a betrayal of gendered expectations, a betrayal of confidence (the reductionist confidence inherent in patriarchal methods of rhetorical comprehension), and a betrayal of disciplinary boundaries and traditional expectations about what feminist rhetoric is or means, a betrayal of publics who, ostensibly, just wanted to be entertained. I approach questions of motive, method, and context as a cautious feminist, a quasi-revisionist historian of rhetoric *and writing* who measures and accounts for the

clear disconnections between how writing mediates women's private lives and public power. Traditionally, the subjects of this study have been conveyed (or conveyed themselves) as "simple symptomatic subject[s]" of gender; in my view, though, their voices should be amplified, their reverberations traced, allowing willing listeners to "hear in [their] voice[s] what is ... intractable" (Barthes 3). The principal characteristic of Haldeman-Julius, Loos, and West's gendered rhetoric is its very intractability, its stubborn resistance to final interpretation, its structural avoidance of resolution *as well* as its coded consciousness-raising methods that at all times work to deny feminist exigence. It is a coded "technology of resistance" that works against a heterogeneous, gendered domination, a response as complex as its adherents' domestic situations and public power, particularly because all this feminist critique (critique of male sexual power) has to make it past the male-dominated gatekeepers of the public sphere, from husbands, to publishers, to directors, to audiences.

Negotiating Spectacles of Mass Communication

Though the spectacle reoccurs in critical circles perennially, it remains, as Steve Neale argues, "notoriously resistant to analysis" ("Hollywood" 54). Several reasons exist for this difficulty, not the least of which is that the spectacle itself, to the extent that scholars can agree on what it is or might be, has been a concept that seems to resist historicization, despite its obvious organic connection with emergent media in the early twentieth century. Indeed, the first sustained treatment of the concept comes from Guy Debord's work in the late 1960s for the Situationist International in Paris, *The Society of Spectacle* (1968). Debord's simplest definition of the spectacle is "the social relationship between people that is mediated by images" (12). The spectacle is the product of a three tier process borrowed from Ludwig Feuerbach (the thinker whose work turns Marx from Hegelianism to materialism). In *The Essence of Religion*

(1841), Feuerbach argues that 1) humans invent the concept of God, 2) they forget they invented the concept, and 3) they reverse the original order, beginning to believe that God invented them – a simple argument but one that perfectly mirrors the process of how images can come to mediate and indeed order the social relationships of actual individuals rather than vice versa. Debord's Marxist critique is never far from the surface; he considers the spectacle "a concrete inversion of life" (12) that "serves as total justification for the conditions and aims of the existing system" (13), a complex, multi-layered, ethotic sleight of hand performed by the dominant class, the major effect of which, for Debord anyway, is the transforming of "[a]ll that once was directly lived" into "mere representation" (12). Not surprisingly, Feuerbach gets *Spectacle's* first epigraph.

The spectacle represents a tautology of ends and means, as well (Debord 15), in its proclamation of "the predominance of appearances and assertions that all human life, which is to say all social life, is mere appearance," becoming a negation "that has *invented a visual form of itself*" (14). On this point I do not so much differ with Debord as desire to offer a qualification that divests my own use of the spectacle from Debord's intentions in two ways: First, Debord's concept (strange for a Marxist) is relatively ahistorical. But his move here is intentional, as he builds into this free-floating conceptual structure a critique of time itself, seemingly derived from Hegel, Marx, and Heidegger. He argues that historicization of the concept of spectacle is potentially fruitless because the spectacle itself "being the reigning social organization of a paralyzed history, of a paralyzed memory, of an abandonment of any history founded in historical time, is in effect *a false consciousness of time*" (114).

On the other hand, for this study anyway, Debord's philosophical maneuver here elides all sorts of potential micro-analyses and historicizations of the spectacle, largely because the

spectacle to some degree always relies on technological means (as I have already mentioned, from the printing press, to newspapers, to radio, to television and film); Debord mistakes this failure to do specific analysis (perhaps because he sees himself writing philosophy) with the inability to do analysis *of* the spectacle and *using* the spectacle – both of which I intend to attempt here.

Second, Debord's notion of the spectacle fails partially due to its Marxist vocabulary of the real and the unreal, of the actual and the fantastic – and it fails to account for the fact that the fantastic is indeed historical (thanks largely to Freud's influence), something Debord's own ideological predisposition obscures, transforming him into a victim of the “*necessary* alienation[,] ... the medium in which the subject realizes himself while losing himself,” he originally attempts to point out (115). The result is a spectacle that becomes overly monolithic and class-based, a view that ignores both the potential for spectacular exigency that can either eschew or trump class domination. Additionally, the overly monolithic spectacle overlooks space where spectacularized media has the potential to create space for critique, for insubordination, for consciousness-raising.

A conceptual schema drawn from Debord's notion of spectacle and Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* makes possible the analytic ability to cut across audiences into counterpublics (as dictated by Nancy Fraser [1991] and Michael Warner [2004]), into smaller segmentations of audience that activist writers understand consume generalized media but also which contain the appropriate interpretive mechanisms to decipher coded critique (critique in which the spectacle is put to use, disrupting the notion that all spectacle is tautological, that its means and ends are necessarily the same): to see feminist critique, the critique of gendered power structures where the mass audience sees only pulp media. Potential counterpublics have a more unstable,

dynamic *habitus* and are more sensitized to the cognitive itch of slyly subversive material (and some, of course, are looking directly for it). In this way, Marxist theory plays into the question of coded feminist rhetoric – but fitfully. For Haldeman-Julius, West, and Loos, gendered rhetorical indirection did not have systemic revolutionary ends, did not approach its audiences oppositionally, and did not aggregate its *ethos*. If anything, its agents avoided those kinds of moves so as not to complicate necessary performances of subservience. As Richard Dyer explains, spectacular space need not proliferate domination, as its technical function (he uses film as an example here) is to

present either complex or unpleasant feelings (e.g. involvement in personal or political events; jealousy, loss of love, defeat) in a way that makes them seem uncomplicated, direct and vivid, not ‘qualified’ or ‘ambiguous’ as day-to-day life makes them, and without intimations of self-deception and pretence. (23)

Spectacle is a condensing machine, a technology of sheen, but, traditionally, scholarship on it has looked only at how that sheen perpetuates various types of domination, not its possibilities for resistance. What film historians like Tom Brown do well is to elaborate on elements or characteristics of particular spectacles (like “the décor of history” and the “spectacular vista” in history films), but they fail to pursue an analysis of the spectacle as an encompassing, non-normative, not-necessarily-Marxist concept (159). The spectacle is, after all, generated by media, but it lives in the minds of audience members, a product of textually generated potentially activating rhetorical engagement-mechanisms.

Indirect feminist rhetoric operating in the spectacle plays with the space between the built-in mass-audience response and the potential counterpublic response, something very similar

to what Leo Charney calls “drift.” Cinema, Charney’s chosen spectacular medium in the early part of the twentieth century,

formed a nexus of two characteristic elements of the culture of modernity: an ontology of representation and an epistemology of drift. The absence of tangible present moments gave rise to a culture of re-presentation in which experience was always already lost, accessible only through retrospective textualization. Re-presentation as a mode of experience took the form of drift, which transfigured empty presence into a new modern epistemology. (8)

Charney’s work on drift is important for our understanding of spectacle for a number of reasons. Initially and most important, Charney’s notion of modernity as a mediatized moment of text-audience engagement brings out a notion of a “culture of representation” a meta-organization of social impulses and *habitus* centered on and mediated by textual technologies. This particularly American spectacle is but one example of a historical culture of representation. Charney’s work never deals with the spectacle explicitly but gets very close to it in some but not all ways. For instance, drift, for Charney, is “mercurial” while, rhetorically speaking anyway, spectacularity is purposive, motivated, and driven by exigency. Nonetheless, capitalizing on the notion of a culture of representation, Charney also identifies for us the spectacular space, the realm of play between the given and the real, between the mediatized and the actual.

Debord’s notion, then, that the spectacle, “[i]n all its specific manifestations – news or propaganda, advertising or the actual consumption of entertainment ... epitomizes the omnipresent celebration of a choice *already made* in the sphere of production, and the consummate result of that choice” is rather unsatisfying and unhelpful, due to its Marxist circularity (13). Here, in my view, Debord delegitimizes the spectacle, making it a kind of

circular mode of domination, whereas (as Loos, Haldeman-Julius, and West will demonstrate) it can be a quasi-revolutionary tool, especially during moments where the proliferation of media coincides with a kind popular rejection of oppositional themes.

In “Gesturing toward Peace: On Silence, the Society of the Spectacle, and the Women in Black Antiwar Protests,” Ashley Elliott Pryor calls on Giorgio Agamben’s notion of spectacle, an updated but still limited concept. Pryor explains,

In the Society of the Spectacle, Nelson Mandela’s birthday becomes an occasion to buy M & Ms, as in the case of the South African advertisement featuring the antiapartheid activist’s beaming face fashioned complexly out of M&Ms and a birthday wish: “Thanks for encouraging us to embrace all our colours. Happy Birthday, Madiba.” (181)

Generally, I agree with Pryor’s critique of the cynicism of the contemporary spectacle, one that [f]or Agamben ... extends well beyond the sum total of commodities to name an entire social relation whereby everything that was once directly lived or experienced has receded into a representational form, is distanced from its use value, and is replaced by “fetishistic” powers to stimulate awe, wonder, desire, fantasy, and deep identification. As such, the Society of the Spectacle is capitalism’s “extreme figure” and represents “the commodity’s final metamorphosis, in which exchange value has completely eclipsed use value and can now achieve the status of absolute irresponsible sovereignty over life in its entirety, after having falsified the entire social production” (76). (183)

While I have no desire to argue with Agamben or Pryor’s central claims and their apt description of contemporary spectacle in all its sinister glory, the pair’s reliance on Marxist depth-models

and the privileging of use value and exchange value fails to capture the potential (at least the historical potential) of the spectacle to be a space used for good – particularly, I think, a space used by some early twentieth century women to combat gender domination *and make money*. The sinister qualities of the spectacle as laid down by Agamben and Pryor certainly exist, but they do not tell the whole story, do not recognize the spectacle as a culture-space focused on representation and the critical capacities of underrepresented groups to use representation to their strategic and monetary advantage.

As Rachel Dressler explains in “Gender as Spectacle and Construct,” gestures in spectacular space “depend on the beholder’s gaze to activate them,” a moment where “the viewer [or, more generally, the audience member] becomes a participant in the ... performance” (1). That spectacular culture-space has historically been a place for female empowerment through coded rhetoric has not heretofore been considered. For this approach to be believable, the reader must understand the spectacle not as inert space, not simply as “to-be-looked-at-ness” as Laura Mulvey calls it (837) but rather as an activating space, one that seems simple, but one whose sheen – and the expectation of public women’s propriety – hid the possibility of raising the awareness of groups of audience members, *potential* counterpublics. These spectacular moments are conversations that take place between writers/rhetors and audience members in the very space of drift, the very modes of representation where the spectacle presents itself as life that shines but does not nourish. Gender is key here. As Brown explains of his notions of the two elements in historical films, “[t]hese two kinds of spectacle can be said to have their own gendered associations. The décor of history is associated with the domestic sphere ... whereas the spectacular vista [is] generally ... associated with the world of men” (160). Brown’s work here, though focused only on one type of film, can and should be extrapolated: Gender pervades

the spectacle. Sometimes it is put to use by the spectacle to fulfill the capitalist's "choice already made" (Debord 13), but other times the spectacle can be put to use to call attention to that very choice, its gendered features, its assumed trajectories of domination. As Alex Jeffry, Colin McFarlane, and Alex Vasudevan explain in their guest editor's introduction to an issue of *Public Culture* called "Debating Capital, Spectacle, and Modernity," the spectacle can also be used to draw attention to itself.

On first inspection, we see an image of a crammed kitchen, unwashed dishes carelessly stacked on an aluminum stove and in a half-filled sink. A pink plastic pitcher, an empty egg carton, an unfinished bowl of soup, and a discarded orange peel suggest a banal still life. Yet what reads like a prosaic domestic scene is, on closer inspection, itself a reconstruction, a paper model whose minute imperfections – an exposed edge, a visible pencil mark – draw attention to the very mechanisms of its making. Thomas Demand's *Kitchen* derives from a news photograph of former Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein's hideaway near his hometown of Tikrit, where he was forced to take refuge during the American invasion of 2003. (531)

Here, in these moments when the spectacle draws attention to its own spectacularization, is where radical feminist rhetoric fits. Between 1917 and 1930, Haldeman-Julius, Loos, and West, all masters of public spectacle, managed to very subtly show their own exposed edges, edges not visible to the mass audiences that consumed their works – but visible to those who were sensitized to the need for gendered critique. It is in this space where spectacle's drift turns hopeful and radical and relinquishes the insidious qualities that Marxist theorists cling to in their descriptions. It is subtle and historical, and if one looks close enough, *it is there*.

The Divided Self and Spectacle as Dreamwork

In her longitudinal study of the phases and development of American autobiographical writing, *Interpreting the Self*, Diane Bjorklund reminds us of the historical and social contingency of the self and its necessary location. “As part of our socialization,” she explains, “we learn *vocabularies of self* to think about and assess our experiences and behavior” (7). And, for Bjorklund, “[s]uch vocabularies of self are not strictly personal”; they are social, historical, dynamic and periodizable (7). In the United States, Bjorklund argues, self-representation begins in the colonial era with presentations of the self-as-morality-play, which graduates into autobiographies of what she calls “masters of the universe” as the nineteenth century draws to a close (88). But the self-mastery of the robber barons gives way at the turn of the twentieth as Freud’s ideas begin to take root in popular American consciousness, and Freud’s self is a divided, somewhat unknowable, desiring, and ultimately an anxious self. Bjorklund continues:

“We are importing the plague,” remarked Sigmund Freud to Carl Jung when they visited the United States in 1909. Since then, numerous commentators have agreed – perhaps not with Freud’s choice of metaphor – but with the view that his ideas, as well as the field of psychology in general, have had a considerable impact on thought in the United States and throughout the Western world. (89) ... [Autobiographies] began to look at the “battle within” in different terms – discussing the troubling “passions” in the more neutral terms of instincts and drives. And they no longer assumed that introspection was a simple task. (90)

One element of particular importance when considering the early twentieth century’s facilitation of the “uncertain self” is how mediatized spectacle not only packaged these Freudian ideas but also came to embody the disassociation of unconscious drives and desires, spectacularizing

Americans' internal uncertainties, uncertainties that divided the self not only into the conscious and unconscious selves but also divided (particularly the world of George Herbert Mead) the self into the internal "I" and the social "me" (Mead 173), a division that succinctly explains the juxtaposition in the early twentieth century between two rising disciplines: psychology and sociology. For both Freud and Mead, then, though one is directed inwardly and the other outwardly, the principle of the divided – and hence the anxious – self is crucial to characterizing the American mind in the early twentieth century. For Bjorklund and important to this study, the fundamental characteristic of this period is a fixation on "motive" (95).

Sigmund Freud's visit to Worcester, Massachusetts, in 1909 to speak at Clark University represented a major milestone in the transformation of American consciousness and in Freud's career. As Nathan Hale explains, before his trip to Clark, Freud "was still a relatively obscure Viennese neurologist, known chiefly to physicians and psychologists on both sides of the Atlantic. His popular vogue in America had not yet begun" (3). As Freud recalled years later,

As I stepped on to the platform at Worcester to deliver my *Five Lectures on Psychoanalysis* it seemed like the realization of some incredible daydream: psychoanalysis was no longer a product of delusion, it had become a valuable part of reality. (Hale 4)

Freud's ideas of the unconscious, the expansive, largely unknowable internality of the self played very nicely to American audiences that caught on immediately to its fit for American culture. Though ostensibly focused on the internal nature of the mind, of past experience, and of psycho-sexual development, psychoanalysis was, for Freud's soon-to-be former student Carl Jung, at least, "an extroverted doctrine, one-sidedly oriented toward the external world and

viewing this world as the ultimate touchstone of reality”; for Jung, Freud’s claim at internality demonstrated a move of indirection itself (Rosenweig 212).

In point of fact, Freud’s trip to America represented an extremely fraught situation on several levels. He wanted desperately to expand psychoanalysis to a global audience, and despite his oft-recorded distaste for the United States, he knew it was crucial for him. Toward the end of establishing widespread and credible notoriety, Freud brought along his wayward disciple Carl Jung. By 1909, Freud and Jung’s relationship had begun to deteriorate. By 1915, the friendship was finished, Jung announcing that he was fed up with Freud’s “tricks” (Rosenweig 216).

Freud knew that two things were to be gained from his trip to the States: one was legitimacy in American psychological circles, circles that by this time were much more interested in Wilhelm Wundt’s laboratory psychology than psychoanalysis. This is why, for instance, an invitation from G. Stanley Hall at Clark was such an important opening for Freud; it represented his ability to slip into the door of academically legitimate American psychology. In addition, though, it also represented the chance to activate the American public to Freud’s particular theory of the self, a theory that allowed for the power of the unconscious wish, which “was incomparably stronger than a wish of which one was fully aware, for one could condemn the latter with all one’s strength and maturity of judgment,” while the former remained true but elusive (Hale 12). The Clark conference offered

a prophetic example of the social interaction that accounts for ... the swift spread of new ideas in the United States. Present at Clark were three major agents of cultural diffusion – professionals, laymen, and the press. Traditionally, each group influenced the others. Professionals with innovations to introduce tried to

win public support. Laymen took a keen interest in the latest scientific expertise.

The press, with which professionals often eagerly cooperated, crystallized styles and disseminated information in hyperbolic and simplistic ways. (Hale 17)

Though Freud's ideas would not reach their cultural peak in the United States until the late 1930s, his theories would reach the first wave of the cultural elite by the early teens – by 1919, sixty percent of Freud's patients were American (Douglas 123). Hale continues, "In America, popular and professional culture were closely bound together, and, beginning with the Clark Conference, the reception of psychoanalysis occurred on both levels" (20).

Freud's contribution to the spectacularization of the American mind cannot go understated, as his theories of consciousness and sexuality created the conditions for mass media to step in and fulfill the conditions of the desire-mechanisms, tools of the desiring individuals that Freud "helped" Americans realize they were. Haldeman-Julius, Loos, and West all had intimate connections with Freud's thought, and each capitalized on his effect on American consciousness. Haldeman-Julius's press was one of the first American publishing houses, besides Boni and Liveright (for which Freud's nephew Edward Bernays worked and with whom Bernays facilitated the first American publication of *A General Introduction of Psychoanalysis* in 1920) to publish work on Freud (*Freud on Sleep and Sexual Dreams* by Anton Booker in 1925), while Anita Loos's famous protagonist in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (also 1925), Lorelei Lee, paid a famous visit to "Dr. Froyd," and Mae West made a serious study of Freud's theories of sexuality before she attained popularity as a writer for stage and screen. Echoes of Freud abound in her first Broadway play, *Sex* (1926). In *Blondes*, Lorelei explains,

So, Dr. Froyd and I had quite a long talk in the english landguage. So it seems that everybody seems to have a thing called inhibitions, which is when you want

to do a thing and you do not do it. So then you dream about it instead. So Dr. Froyd asked me, what I seemed to dream about. So I told him that I never really dream about anything. I mean I use my brains so much in the day time that at night they do not seem to do anything else but rest. ... So then he seemed very very intreeged at a girl who always seemed to do everything she wanted to do. ... So then he called in his assistance and he pointed at me and talked to his assistance quite a lot in the Viennese landguage. So then his assistance Looked at me and looked and me and it really seems as if I was quite a famous case. So then Dr. Froyd said that all I needed was to cultivate a few inhibitions and get some sleep. (Loos *Blondes* 90)

Freud was not simply a mine for jokes, though; rather, he conditioned in the American mind the spectacle of media as a kind of dream-state, a place where desire is mapped, where our unconscious, sexualized impulses draw us to identity, where the real and imagined coalesce. As Freud explains in *Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious* (1905)

At the end of the chapter which dealt with the elucidation of the technique of wit (p. 125) we asserted that the processes of condensation with and without substitutive formation, displacement, representation through absurdity, representation through the opposite, *indirect representation*, etc., all of which we found participated in the formation of wit, evinced a far-reaching agreement with the processes of “dream-work.” (249)⁴

This spectacle-as-social dreamspace, though, is a social/ideational relation in which and through which projected, spectacularized desires offer a world that is at once apart from and somewhere

⁴ Emphasis mine.

inside us. For Haldeman-Julius, Loos, and West, Freud's contribution to the emergent spectacles of media came in the effect his theories had on orienting the American public comfortably to its own spectacularization, its own self-representation. What Freud added to mediatized spectacle, for these women, was a critical space into which indirect critique could be inserted. The important parallel Freud makes between wit and dream-work is of the greatest significance in the exploration of his role in helping to create a particularly American spectacle, where media-space, American's collective gendered identity-crises, and eventually feminist critique merged.

While Freud's *Three Essays on Sexuality* (1905) has garnered much critical, *Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious* has not. When read together, Freud's contribution to the spectacle becomes clearer: he is defining the parameters of sexual desire (and hence the politics of gender) at the same time that he is relating both of these to the practice of world-making, writing, and speaking. Freud's theory of wit, in particular, echoes the tautological aspects of Debord's (admittedly later) theorization of the spectacle – it functions as an arresting of progress, the confluence of ends and means. In *The Rhetoric of Concealment*, Rosemary Kegl argues that “Freud's own theories about joking assert a notion of simultaneity [and] resistance to temporal process” that echo the spectacle's illusory quality, elements that indicate the spectacle as a rich, nuanced, *gendered* political/critical space (22).

The Spectacular Modern Woman

From their numerous magazine interviews in the teens and twenties, their interest in fashion, and her witty banter, it doesn't take much effort to understand these subjects as a modern women and therefore, to some degree, anyway, as entities of appearance. Despite their media-friendliness and courtship of the spotlight, these women were first writers – more notable, at first, anyway, for manipulating the public's gaze than being subject to it. Liz Conor argues

that the modern woman's subjectivity was constructed by her very awareness of being seen, her ability "to appear," a theme about which Loos, Haldeman-Julius, and West were ambivalent, often noting the importance of appearance and its captivating potential.

Conor borrows the notion of appearing from Judith Butler's performance feminism, feminism that disrupts ontological binaries by subversively agglomerating complex signifiers within one palimpsest/body. For Butler, the feminine "enacts the repetitive performance of 'appearing to be' the phallus" (4). In Butler's reading of Freud, though, women do not ever realize the phallus; they internalize its inaccessibility and through a process much like mourning the death of a loved one, incorporate that lost other into themselves in a complex and melancholic act of identification (58). For Butler, this act of self-denial-via-identification parallels gender's imitative appetite for appearances and appearing. Conor's argument that modern women have identified with the social pressure to be seen, with the scopophilic fixation on their externalities and have consequently built reflexive subject positions around this awareness-of-awareness is catalyzing though problematic. "Does one," she asks, "appear to be a woman in accordance with a preordained designation as woman, or come into being as woman through appearing to be feminine?" (5)

Women's awareness of appearing is highlighted by modernity's developing technologies. Rather than Benjamin's work of art in the age of mechanical production, the new question becomes the status of identity-work in the age of mechanical reproduction.

"Appearing" describes how the changed conditions of feminine visibility in modernity invited a practice of the self which was centered on one's visual status and effects. "Feminine visibility" refers to the entire range of women's capacity to be seen: from self-apprehension in a mirror, to being seen in public space, to

becoming an image through industrialized visual technologies such as the camera. The Modern Woman was spectacularized. For women to identify themselves as modern, the performance of their gendered identity had to take place within the modern spectacularization of everyday life. (Conor 7)

Butler attributes this recognition by the modern woman that her primary ontology comes in being seen a kind of melancholic substitution-anxiety borrowed from Freud. Conor's rereading of (Butler's) Freud, then, arrives at the notion that the modern woman is necessarily melancholic.

In *The Ego and the Id* (1923), Freud argues that in this state, the id's desired object and its entire system of cathexes is absorbed into the ego through the process of "setting up ... the object inside the ego" (24). For Freud, female subjects are particularly prone to melancholic substitution. "In women," he argues, "who have had many experiences in love there seems to be no difficulty in finding vestiges of their object-cathexes in the traits of their character. ... In such cases," he goes on, "the alteration in character has been able to survive the object-relation and in a certain sense to conserve it," not unlike the process of the internalization of the Oedipal Father and the subsequent production of the superego, a stage fraught with obstacles – even for males – who (hopefully) experience eventual graduation into self-control, into phallic-ownership (24). That said, following Butler, even the perception of phallic ownership becomes more like a shady lease agreement, a pretense, a performance of ownership (59).

Conor's belief that the modern woman became complacent with the internalization of her own image is both provocative and somewhat misleading, particularly as her notion of the spectacle – the mode of her self-differentiation – diverges radically from its origin in Debord's work. For Debord, whose Marxism demanded a repudiation of Freud's individual as a bourgeois fantasy, the spectacular had a decidedly negative function. Spectacularization, according to

Debord, results in a sociocultural process shockingly similar to Freud's melancholia. It is a function of derealization, of loss, of separation. In the spectacle,

Images detached from every aspect of life merge into a common stream, and the former unity of life is lost forever. Apprehended in a partial way, reality unfolds in a new generality as a pseudo-world apart, solely as an object of contemplation. The tendency toward the specialization of image-of-the-world finds its highest expression in the world of the autonomous image, where deceit deceives itself. The spectacle in its generality is a concrete insertion of life, and, as such, the autonomous movement of non-life. (12)

While it is clear that Debord is rewriting Feuerbach's *Essence of Religion* (1841) for contemporary mediatized times, it is also clear that the spectacle for him is an intensely negative thing, analogous to the church in Feuerbach's work, both necessary to understand human trajectories and antithetical to them. God, for Feuerbach and his left-Hegelian brethren, results in a process of invention, forgetting, and inversion, a process that results in a contradiction between faith and love, a self-aggrandizing self-denial.

Genealogically, this does not bode well for Conor's modern woman, relegated to the fabric of representation in which she struggles to find power that is at once not hers and not real but through which she can, in the production of self, determine her own view of being viewed, her own guilty complicity in the spectacle. "Modernity's visions of women," Conor argues, "became part of women's self-perception as modern: gendered representations became embodied" (8). Being seen, though, hardly approaches the complexity of modern woman's experience and cultural power. Lest scholars oversimplify the modern woman, film historian Janet Steiger reminds us that this

ideological vision also included the possibilities for Woman. Moreover, because no unified middle-class position existed, the representation was not a coherent and unified act of repression but indexed struggle instead. Thus the New Good Woman was actually a lot of New Good Women, counterbalanced by many New Bad Women. The more people represented Woman the more possibilities developed for complexity and contradiction. Rather than see Woman as Other (the “opposition” thesis), we need to understand Woman as a sign with multiple meanings. (xiv)

Conor’s emphasis on the visible works against what Rita Felski calls the “recurring identification of the modern with the public” that is “responsible for the belief that women were situated outside processes of history and social change” (16). Women can enter public culture through the doors of visibility-induced identity formation, *or, as the women in this cohort of rhetors demonstrate, they can enter through the creation or manipulation of those visible parameters.* While access to public culture is crucial in reading the modern woman, her deference to spectacular visibility is not. Indeed, a radical subset of modern women made and remade public culture by way of seeing rather than being seen. *If the a/effect of visibility conditioned the empowered though melancholic modern woman, the employment of visibility conditioned the radical modern woman.* Identity, in both cases, functions as the axis upon which appearance/appearing is either (in the melancholic) internalized or (in the radical) instrumentalized.

Though this theorizing of the modern woman is noteworthy, not much work has been done on the rhetorical methods put to use by certain modern women, methods used in the creation of public constructions of spectacularized masculinity. European literary modernity,

according to Felski, had begun this process well-before spectacular American modernity caught up and “repositioned” the male body “as a source of visual pleasure and an object of desire” even as it tended to reveal that body “as a highly coded and artificial construct” (103). Indeed, as Conors argues, the “correlation between spectatorship and modern subjectivity is crucial” (16).

It not only underpins the claim that modernity centers on the visual, but it implies that only spectators can be included in the category of the modern subject. The traditional divide between subject and object is reproduced between spectator and spectacle. ... If this division is also gendered, an alternative view of the feminine spectacle is obscured: one that is not exclusionary, one that challenges rather than confirms the traditional division between spectator and spectacle, subject and object. The newly emerged subject position of the modern appearing woman subverted those divisions, inviting a reappraisal of their appropriateness in the analysis of visual culture. (16)

Backpedaling against earlier overtures toward Freudian melancholia, Conor ultimately places the modern woman outside the divisions of subject and object, buffered by awareness, a move that risks her own loss of the academic’s generic frame in the name of identity politics; Conor herself espouses the importance of being seen in her own development. Those modern women, the modern writers and rhetors who manufactured feminine spectacles, were, for a brief but fortuitous time, bearers of the potential for radical public power.

Performance and Audience in Indirect Feminist Rhetoric

Expanding on spectacle as a frame for indirect feminist rhetoric between the turn of the century and 1930 means sensitizing ourselves to the “quantum change [that] occurred in the quality of public life” during this era, when Americans’ “reality began to alter” through the

supplementation of celebrity-centered media and its spectacular consolidating of consumer attention (Schickel 8). But this moment represents, in media's grasping for the attention of mass audiences, not just the centralization of cultural attention and opinion but the possibility of radical indirect feminist rhetoric that made use of spectacular, centralizing space *as well as* assumptions about the proprietary constraints of women writing in the public sphere.

As Richard Schickel argues in *His Picture in the Papers: A Speculation on Celebrity in America Based on the Life of Douglas Fairbanks, Sr.*,

[t]he people who existed in this separate reality – the stars and celebrities – were as familiar to us, in some ways, as our friends and neighbors. In many respects we were – and are – more profoundly involved with their fates than we are with those of most of the people we know personally. They command enormous amounts of our psychic energy and attention. ... It is in this surreal world that all significant national questions are personified and dramatized. (8,10)

For Debord, and extremely useful for this study, this personification and dramatization of individuality function to create the spectacle as a kind of social organization, taking Freudian/Burkean identification mechanisms and extending them to the arrangement of social agents.

The spectacle is not, as Ashley Elliott Pryor argues, a place, only, where

exchange value has completely eclipsed use value and can now achieve the status of absolute irresponsible sovereignty over life in its entirety, after having falsified the entire social production. (Agamben qtd. in Pryor 183)

Agamben and Pryor's use of the spectacle-as-cultural-waste-bin fails to account for the portentous rise of critical possibilities that the spectacle-in-transition generated in the early

twentieth century. The spectacle, for each member of this dissertation's subject-cohort, *was* a place to make money, but financial ends were red herrings – to a large degree – that covered over the much more important pursuance of publics by radically covert writers. Pryor and Agamben see the spectacle only as the “culmination of modern capitalist production in which the value of human production shifts from its use and exchange values to its value as image or representation – as a commodity” (182). Each fails to see the radical import and space created within modes of representation, especially when they are historicized. Even the spectacle, what they call a culmination of modern production, was incipient and vulnerable to occupation at some point, as was the culture in which it proliferated. That said, there are similarities between what Pryor and Agamben call the “culture of gesture” and the culture of incipient spectacle in the sense used in this dissertation insofar as

when thought functions by way of the gesture, what becomes significant in a given human activity is less how well it accords with a pre-given structure or schema ... but rather the character or quality of its enactment within its given environment of context (what we could call its sense of responsiveness). (185)

In that way, it becomes relatively simple to read the moves made by Loos, Haldeman-Julius, and West as spectacular gestures, gestures not only meant to raise consciousness about gender domination but also to raise awareness about the very means by which that gesture is conveyed. The historical and mediatized context for this cohort's indirect feminist rhetoric is fundamental to this study, lest we lose even the “gesture,” which becomes “[the] communication of a communicability” (185). While this is interesting, I find it a kind of dead-end. Loos, Haldeman-Julius, and West *did* have something to say, but because of gatekeepers at home or in the audience, they had to speak in code. That said, there is no denying the gestural quality of their

work, but their differing gendered critiques keep them from drifting off into the no (wo)man's land of "pure mediality."

In sum, feminist indirection in these years represents a kind of evolution of the traditional Habermasian public sphere, one that challenges the notion of the public sphere as being dictated by reason or rationality, though it does maintain the important imprint of its bourgeois beginnings (indeed, feminist indirect rhetoric during this period is definitionally market-friendly) (Habermas 14). Here, the public is dictated not by the distribution of information for the means of public debate but seems to function in a distinctly opposite way – it is a unifier, a tool used to coalesce the American mind along issues of national identity, gender expectations, and commoditization. As George Bataille argues in *The Accursed Share*, capitalism is, after all, "an unreserved surrender to *things*, heedless of consequences and seeing nothing beyond them ... [whose] advantage was clear, in minds always quick to grasp the *real* object, of allowing intimacy to recede beyond the threshold of consciousness" (136). Bataille's analysis comes from a more Marxist place than mine, but it remains useful in its notion of how spectacular commodification of people-as-things (celebrities, for instance), allows for intimacy's crossing the threshold of consciousness, not unlike a Trojan horse, loaded with subversive ideas.⁵

Indirection of this sort has manifested before in literature on folk histories and techniques and represents a rich history of negotiations and interpretations of indirect responses to the public transcript. In *Folk Women and Indirection in Morrison, Ni Dhuibhne, Hurston, and Lavin*, for instance, Jacqueline Fulmer suggests that indirection may be traceable back to Aristotle's very definition of rhetoric as taking in and acting upon "in any given case[,] the available means of

⁵ My hope is that this study, once completed, could lead to or play into another, more contemporary look at celebrity and its mediatized technologies of self – not in the terms that Foucault used (the technologies of repression) but rather in terms like Scott would use (the technologies of resistance). In some very real ways, we have not come to the end of the American Spectacular, particularly noting our continuing devotion to celebrity and the advent of things like reality television.

persuasion” (Fulmer 1). This apparent (though not actual) conflation of rhetoric and indirection comes from Fulmer’s emphasis on the *purposes* of indirection. Fulmer offers that the basis for comparing the authors she reads does not stem from preemptive confusion of rhetoric and indirection generally but instead from the use of “story as a means of meeting a rhetor’s expressive goals” that “can allow him or her to evade the societal limits placed on speech or writing” (1).⁶ For Fulmer, the creative use of *story-as-indirection* serves to highlight her explanation of how women can “write on subjects not often seen in print, either before or during their eras” (1). Importantly, as well, Fulmer articulates rhetorical indirection as a sub-genre (perhaps an autochthonous one) of feminist criticism, calling upon and paraphrasing Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s well-taken claim in *The Madwoman in the Attic* that public (or writing) women are often subject to “female stereotyping along a scale of extremes” (3). In this case, indirect rhetoric demonstrates itself to be elegantly in tune with topographies of audience expectation about “extremes of Otherness” (3).

The philosophical and folk history elements of rhetorical indirection tie Fulmer’s book to Henry Louis Gates Jr.’s foundational text, *The Signifyin’ Monkey*, through analyses of Zora Neale Hurston’s use of free indirect discourse, which is a third person narration style that adopts conventionally first person tendencies. For Gates, “Hurston draws upon free indirect discourse as a written voice masked by a speakerly voice” (243) a move allows Hurston’s fiction writing to deftly foreground orality in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* “[a]s an element of theme and as a highly accomplished rhetorical strategy”; free indirect discourse, for Gates, “depends for its effect on ... bivocality,” the “voicing of a divided consciousness” (240). It is, to risk sounding

⁶ In any new and responsible work, these constraints have to be articulated, their political, personal, and situational encumbrances made explicit. No longer, in work that appeals to indirection, should authors speak out against some kind of abstractions – for that is a shortcut, a strawman move that ultimately undercuts the value of indirection, value that is situationally-laden.

oblique, a kind of showing *and* telling. Despite its potential and no matter its reflexive capacities, free indirect discourse tends toward what Wayne Booth calls “*stable* or fixed” irony (a stable or fixed indirection) (6).⁷ In *A Rhetoric of Irony*, Booth explains that “once a reconstruction of meaning has been made, the reader is not then invited to undermine it with further demolitions and reconstructions” (6). Hence, Hurston’s free indirect discourse fixes orality and the attention to orality as its interpretive axis, becoming at once both substance and subject.

Booth’s project in *A Rhetoric of Irony* locates the production of indirection in the ether of style and tone, but as rhetorical indirection is not the central theme of his book, discussions about it are limited. However, Booth does offer an insight into the historical germination and growth of indirect rhetoric.

We thus have two curiously parallel projects of expansion in modern times. Two devices of indirection that once kept their place in a classically defined order, performing metaphoric or ironic functions in genres with larger or at least different demands, have expanded themselves – in Symbolism and what might be called Ironism – to fill the whole world of the maker. “The Metaphor” and “the Irony” have thus been proclaimed as genres in their own right. (177)

This dissertation diverges from Booth’s implication that indirection itself may well have become its own genre, after an incipency and germination in other genres.⁸ This is an important point: rhetorical indirection, even as I attempt to define its parameters, fundamentally demands a

⁷ This fixity, though, it up for debate. For instance, in Anita Loos’s highly parodic work *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1925), Loos uses free indirect discourse, but her radicalism comes in its combination with other types of rhetorical indirection (like genre coding), which allow her to create a multi-layered critical parody that resists final interpretation (very much the opposite of the way, say, Jonathan Swift’s parody *A Modest Proposal* does not).

⁸ This is to say that rhetorical indirection always depends on a genre to a greater or lesser degree. It can never grow into its own genre, else it loses its critical leverage and reason for being, its very character.

locality, a specific place and time – lest its conceptual status becomes drained both of its historical and critical potential and a radical vehicle for social critique is lost to self-immolation.

For feminists, embodying and contextualizing rhetorical indirection is crucial. Tellingly, Karen Kopelson puts her finger on a problem not just salient in classroom situations but any situations in which feminist/radical/activist rhetors (and in her case, teachers) approach their radical content through oppositional strategies, strategies that she characterizes as “resistance” (119). Kopelson’s point that for members of marginalized communities who happen to be teachers of writing, pedagogical approaches to activist subject matter, subject matter that “force[s] us to inhabit the world in fundamentally new and different ways,” create communication barriers in which the given teacher is read as playing out his or her own autobiographical and political impulses on students who prefer a seemingly more objective approach (119). Kopelson explains,

In fact, I would argue that in today’s suspicious and resistant classrooms, it is often this very conscientiousness, the concerted effort with which we do “teach for diversity,” that itself delimits pedagogical effects and effectiveness, especially if we are marked or read as “different” in such a way that students may ascribe political agendas to us the minute we walk into the classroom. (120)

In many ways, despite their rhetorical contexts being separated by nearly a century and their audiences being somewhat differently composed, Kopelson’s performative teachers, teachers who perform neutrality and take on personas that feign “objectivity,” are very similar to Loos, Haldeman-Julius, and West as feminists. While on face indirect, rhetorical feminism and composition instruction do not seem that similar, they share inner didactic or consciousness-raising elements and depend largely for their success on their abilities to convey information in

convincing ways. Historically, beginning with suffrage movements in the nineteenth century, feminism has, like contemporary composition instruction, preferred “resistant” approaches, approaches that foregrounded their didacticism.

In *Writing Permitted in Designated Areas Only*, Linda Brodkey’s relation to Kopelson’s text returns the discussion to the role of the researcher/teacher/scholar’s role in the reproduction of hegemonic stories; that is, it returns to my status as conveyer of the (and I know how funny this sounds) *the truth behind the indirection I record and assert*. This work does not amend itself to Brodkey’s notion of *negative critique*. This is a good thing, as she asserts that many if not most of these critiques simply reproduce the hegemonic structures whatever theory leads researchers to look for. “So, an ethnographer who enters the scene on the presumption that the social arrangements” in a given situation “will favor the interests of a dominant group is undeniably looking for hegemonic practices” but is also constrained by these practices, constrained to see and record things a certain, terministic way (107). I privilege not negative critique but a kind of celebratory/celebrity ethnography of mediatized indirection, a kind of reverse critique that shows counter-hegemonic activity in registers that are traditionally overlooked, allowing my readers (like Kopelson’s students) to form their own critical opinions of the hegemonic positions and rhetorical situations these women were put in to begin with. For Brodkey, “The only way to fight a hegemonic discourse is to teach ourselves and others alternative ways of seeing the world and discussing what it is we have come to understand as theory, research, and practice” (113). Indeed, pushing the limits of expected research and accepted research is part of history writing, according to Wendy B. Sharer’s notion that it ought to fill the “gaps of existing historical accounts” (120). It should also, though, expand the

questions that underlie those gaps, not just questions of hegemony, power, culture, but questions of motive, language-use, and exigence.

Habermas defined the public sphere as a mediatized space characterized by “*people’s use of their reason*” (27),⁹ and, in a nutshell, this “reason,” the hegemonic agreement between and among dominant modes of economic and sociopolitical behavior (as well as assumptions about the proprietary restrictions of public women, women who attained audiences), provides the context for gendered indirect rhetoric by which marginalized voices access the public sphere, create “counterpublics” within it, or co-opt its market strategies for radical ends. That said, indirect rhetoric is not everything or everywhere; rather, its manifestations are multiple but limited, its strategies irregular, and its outcomes often overlooked, particularly when its practitioners are women. It is inextricably (and sometimes quixotically) linked to what Scott in a revisionist twist on the debate-filled but relatively homogeneous (Habermasian) bourgeois public sphere calls the “symbolization of domination by demonstrations and enactments of power” (45). Rhetorical indirection does not comprise a sneaky rejection of a monolithic truth. Instead, it comprises a tactical and visionary rejection, parodization, or co-optation of the public transcript’s “appearance of unanimity,” its “dramaturgy ... of domination,” and ultimately, a co-optation of its audience (45, 66).

The one thing that is, perhaps, the greatest risk in this dissertation is that it, at times, fails to take women writers’ words about themselves and their subject positions as the truth, seeking instead to engender the idea that indirect rhetoric begins with some sort of elision of one’s true exigence. This comes, certainly, from my life-long tendency to become, as Julie Jung explains, “energized intellectually and personally by the disruptions that result when I put two ‘wrong’

⁹ Italics added.

things together” (xi), out of the strange thrill that comes in creating what Jung calls “a revisionary rhetoric,” a rhetoric that is “situated at the intersection of feminism and revision,” one that highlights “a rhetoric of relationship, one grounded in a feminist postmodern epistemology” (9) but not confined exclusively to its negative critical *ethos*.

My reconstruction of Jung’s useful approach is rather simple: sometimes women rhetors are likely to be more effective when they *seem to work within* the limitations inscribed on them from without *while* at the same time using those very expectations as springboards for more structurally radical critiques, critiques that are, due to their elision of oppositional discourse, more likely to find popular audiences. As film historian Molly Haskell explains of Loos’s work in the teens and twenties, Loos “always knew [women] were more intelligent than men, but that in [her scenarios and screenplays, she was] smart enough not to let men know it” (44). Loos and her cohort are not just assembling a complex dodge or con, but rather they are forming indirect feminist *ethos* as codesmiths, assembling critiques through their establishment of oblique and complex “writer/reader relationship[s]” (Jung 10). What keeps this, I hope, from falling prey to the critique that my approach is misogynist (that I read women as manipulative or constitutionally or situationally unable to plainly state the truth) is that I focus on indirect rhetoric as a *performative rhetorical enterprise*, an enterprise that, I argue, these powerful, public women chose, one which these burgeoning technologies of communication allow them. These women find mass popularity *as well as* feminist legitimacy.

In performing these indirect feminist rhetorics, Loos, Haldeman-Julius, and West, in their own different ways, seek to overturn the paradox of audience that, as Jacques Ranciere points out, relegates the spectator to one simply who views, one whose activity consists in “the opposite of knowing,” one who is “held before an appearance in a state of ignorance about the process of

production of this appearance and about the reality it conceals” (2). Audiences for indirect feminist rhetors such as these are necessarily lifted out of passivity, *activated* by the very dog-whistle quality of the message they witness. *They are, if the message is properly received, implicated in it.* This implication speaks to the second way that indirect feminist rhetoric overturns traditional audience paradoxes. Ranciere argues that these audiences who remain ignorant and passive are “separated from both the capacity to know and the power to act” (2). In a very real sense, what makes the messages sent by these women, be they ironic vivisections of masculine power and limitation or desperate pleas for help from beneath the rein of an abusive spouse, so important is that they are always pleas for action, for changes in interpretation, for consciousness-raising.

Indirect feminist rhetoric, , like Ranciere’s project, is an emancipation of the spectator – a challenge to the audience. These rhetors know, ultimately, that though their messages are often alien to the spectacular media in which they are delivered, that their audiences are small subsections of the generalized “other” expected to exist on the receiving side of mass-media, whose principle goal is to create future counter-publics from within the mass, to create resistance to gendered and sexual subversion: “she at least knows one thing: she knows that she must *do one thing* – overcome the gulf separating activity from passivity” (Ranciere 12). Ranciere continues,

For in all these performances what is involved is linking what one knows with what one does not know; being at once a performer deploying her skills and a spectator observing what these skills might produce in a new context among other spectators. Like researchers, artists construct the stages where the manifestation and effect of their skills are exhibited, rendered uncertain in the terms of the new

idiom that conveys a new intellectual adventure. The effect of the idiom cannot be anticipated. It requires spectators who play the role of active interpreters, who develop their own translation in order to appropriate the ‘story’ and make it their own story. An emancipated community is a community of narrators and translators. (22)

The idea that indirect feminist rhetoric is at play in the spectacular space made possible by forms of mass communication does not shy away from “the truth of the concept of spectacle as fixed by Guy Debord: the spectacle is not the display of images concealing reality. It is the existence of social activity and social wealth as a separate reality,” and it is from this reality, from this isolated place – one Ranciere compares “to that of the shackled prisoners in Plato’s cave” – where gender is constructed as *topos* for indirect rhetoric, a “place where images are taken for realities, ignorance for knowledge, and poverty for wealth” (45). It is *because* these indirect feminist rhetors demonstrate their shackles back to their publics through the indirection made possible by the fire light on Plato’s cave wall that makes them so delightfully subversive and which, in the end, demarcates them as a select cohort of rhetors (45). Neither do they resist the spectacle, nor do they accept what it has made of them; through the spectacle, however shadowy, traces of feminism emerge – but only to audiences who, at the time of writing or later, are accustomed to listening closely. That is the aim of this project.

This dissertation is structured upon three major sections, each focusing on the recovery of a particular feminist literary figure and paying attention to the modalities or technologies in which that particular thinker proffered what I call indirect feminist rhetoric. The work centers on the questions of how a woman can be a feminist without claiming to be one, how a woman can offer feminist rhetoric in multiple writing technologies, and how a woman can offer feminist

critique in counterpropositional ways, ways in which she herself avoids direct propositionality (the principle fodder of traditional rhetoric), that is, avoids making straightforward claims as well as denying the person under scrutiny the ability to argue back in propositional ways. In this way, this dissertation offers a challenge to traditional rhetoric *and* traditional feminism, both of which have functioned in a tacitly acknowledged public and political space (with its suggestion of political or at least propositional equanimity). By undermining the requirement for propositionality in both of these discursive traditions, this work seeks to extend the boundaries of rhetoric and feminism, making possible the recovery of women previously assumed to lie outside the parameters of feminism. Secondly, this approach makes possible the creation of rhetorical analytics previously unseen in the rhetorical tradition (particularly those of indirection). I argue that both feminism and rhetoric will be greatly enriched by this approach, which seeks to extend the discussions beyond the propositional rhetorics assumed in spaces (all too) comfortable with identity politics. Finally, I pose the question: What messages and people get lost behind, around, and in-between these propositions? The answer to this question is biographical, technological, and rhetorical.

Chapter one, then, approaches the development of Marcet Haldeman-Julius's indirect feminist rhetoric in relation to the writing technologies available to her, specifically via a socialist publishing company operated by Haldeman-Julius and her husband; her indirect rhetorical strategy manifests itself in the concrete denial of exigence *as well* as what I call genre camouflage – writing autobiographically in genres where autobiographical detail is not expected. Sensitized politically from her earliest work with her aunt Jane Addams at Hull House and versed in performance from her years as a Broadway ingénue, Haldeman-Julius had both a desire for social justice and a deep connection for the political potential of performance; these elements

combined when, upon returning to her native Kansas from New York, she entered into a difficult marriage with Emanuel Julius, a socialist writer. Trapped in an abusive marriage where her significant assets were stolen and hidden and her personal worth attacked, Haldeman-Julius combined her performative nuance with her political and personal desire to gain audiences by critiquing her husband through several modalities of writing: the novel, the gossip column, and the historical monograph. Denied her property and dignity by her husband, Haldeman-Julius's indirect critiques of the man who functioned as the gatekeeper to a public audience represents the least abstract form of indirect feminist rhetoric: the explicit or implicit denial of exigence.

Chapter two recovers the feminist work of Anita Loos, whose indirect rhetorical feminism operates on a level abstracted from Haldeman-Julius's: the ironic construction of male privilege and the parodic construction of feminine power. Loos, as a writer for early Hollywood, begins her career surreptitiously aping the blind male privilege of Douglas Fairbanks (and his onscreen counterpart), creating him as a kind of puppet whose performances indicate a complete lack of self-awareness, particularly in her 1916 work, *His Picture in the Papers*. Loos continues to develop her use of irony and parody as indirect rhetorical critique in her 1925 novella *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* and its protagonist, Lorelei Lee, best remembered perhaps as played by Marilyn Monroe in Howard Hawkes' 1954 film adaptation. Using Lee's persona and the genre camouflage of the "diary of a professional woman," a woman whose lack of intelligence is encapsulated in hilariously misconstrued phrases, misspellings, and conceptual vagary, Loos proffers a bold critique. Here, Loos critiques her friend and "idol" H.L. Mencken's 1917 work *In Defense of Women*, a work that claims women are smarter because they are weaker. Loos's construction of Lee takes Mencken at his misogynistic word and creates a character that both rhetorically undermines and counterpositionally deflates Mencken's windy self-importance.

Loos's development from ironist of male privilege to parodist of the limitations of female empowerment represents the second level of abstraction in this work's indirect rhetorical analytic.

Chapter three demonstrates, in its analysis of the writings of Mae West, the final level of abstraction in the indirect feminist rhetorical analytic: audience co-optation, made possible through the fusing of the biographical reality and spectacular creation through a rhetoric of *ekphrasis*, the textualization of the visual (the spectacularization of textuality). This move underscores West's almost complete convergence with the spectacle as, among other things, a negotiation of personal trauma and a consolidating of gendered rhetorical power.¹⁰ West's work as a Broadway writer indicates her use of that modality to woo audiences for her bawdy, lowbrow humor and to co-opt their gaze by creating for herself a character space of rhetorical redoubling gender performance, as her childhood crush, Bert Williams, redoubled and disrupted race on the vaudeville stage as an African American man who performed in blackface. West renders herself a space, a spectacular space, against which audience desires are broadcast – but a space that confuses and challenges those projections, questioning the ontological voracity of gender itself, as well as the traditional expectations of power that come with ontological constructions of sex as a form of male privilege.

West's creation of this character space functions rhetorically as exadversion, a rhetorical enterprise where one asserts things through double negative. What allows West to confuse and challenge the assumed ontologies of gender and sexuality is her ability to simultaneously operate within and without the diegetical frames she constructs for herself in her performances. West's final and most interesting play from her theatrical period is her *coup de grace* of ontological

¹⁰ West's work negotiates both her own early sexual traumas and the parallel traumas of homosexual men.

gender critique, *The Drag* (1927). The play consisted of a cast made up largely of gay male characters in drag and ended with a huge spectacular drag ball, the loud music and bright lights of which cover over the vicious murder of a gay man by his disgruntled lover. In the last scene, the dead man's father ashamedly lies about the murder, whitewashing his son's sexuality out of existence. West's rhetorical indirection is fundamentally more abstract than Haldeman-Julius's or Loos's because it does not deign to critique particular men; rather, it pulls the rug out from under gender itself, along with all the assumptions about power that come with it. If Haldeman-Julius's feminist genius comes in the critique of her abuser in mediums through which he functioned as her gatekeeper and Loos's feminist genius comes in the ability to ironize and parody both genders toward the critique of blind male privilege, then West's genius comes in her ability to undermine the fundamental hierarchies of gender and power. All the while, each of these women functioned as wildly successful writers who continued to entertain *and challenge*, making them members of an elite club of feminists so often erased from feminist history. This work is an attempt to relocate them, their legacies, their technologies, and their power.

Chapter 2

“What the Editor’s Wife is Thinking About”: Performance, Politics, and Personhood in Marcet Haldeman-Julius’s Indirect Feminist Rhetoric

In so far as machinery dispenses with muscular power, it becomes a means of employing labourers of slight muscular strength, ... but whose limbs are all the more supple. – Karl Marx, *Capital, Vol I*.

[Women] are still at it[. ...] They are working more inconspicuously than in the old days, but with the same amazing clarity and tenacity of purpose. – Crystal Eastman, *On Women and Revolution*

A woman, especially if she has the misfortune of knowing anything, should conceal it as well as she can. – Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*

Here, I offer a case study examining the rhetorical strategies employed by early twentieth-century feminist and socialist author Marcet Haldeman-Julius (1887-1941). This chapter attempts to answer the question of how rhetorical critique and feminist self-avowal can thrive in unlikely contexts, contexts where its messages, if delivered in propositional format, are unwelcome, where self-disclosure is encircled by either gatekeepers or disinterested audiences. Born to wealthy parents in the small Kansas hamlet of Girard and a niece to the internationally famous humanitarian, Jane Addams, Marcet grew up privileged. She was educated at Bryn Mawr and the American Academy of Dramatic Arts, had a short-lived stage career, returning home to Kansas at the behest of her mother’s will, which threatened to take away her inheritance if she did not. Back in Kansas and nearing 30, Marcet met and married another former New Yorker, Emanuel Julius, a veteran of the national socialist press newly arrived in Girard to work at the town’s famous socialist paper, *The Appeal to Reason*. Though Marcet had maintained and nurtured a desire to write for public audiences as a young person, her increasingly abusive and

isolating marriage motivated her to develop indirect rhetorical strategies to both reach out to sympathetic female audiences *and* to take her husband to task in ways that would not impinge upon his editorial sensibilities. These indirect interventions were represented in her most compelling authorial output, coming in the last years of her explosive marriage, just before her early death from breast cancer at age 54.

Marcet Haldeman-Julius's indirect rhetoric grows throughout the course of her life, and this chapter traces those developments. After situating Haldeman-Julius in a generational and ideological conversation with her aunt Jane Addams, I pursue the origins of her indirect rhetorical style to a rejection of Franklin Sargent's Delsartean performance semiotics at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts in New York and her subsequent return home to Girard, Kansas. Next, I explore Haldeman-Julius's developing relation to publics and the rise of her critical, feminist exigence – an abusive marriage to her editor and publisher, around and about whom she writes in the couple's first gritty, realist novel, *Dust* (1924). While *Dust* represents the first phase of Haldeman-Julius's continually devolving marriage and critical response, her gossip column "What the Editor's Wife is Thinking About," occasionally published in the couple's periodical, the *Haldeman-Julius Monthly*, represents her fully developed indirect feminist critique, particularly in its employment of strategic rhetorical silences.

Many of the primary texts I will engage were written during Haldeman-Julius's most productive fifteen-year period, between 1921 and 1936, a period when her marriage deteriorated rapidly and the author had to write, sometimes, to feed her children, to appeal to larger audiences, especially those sympathetic to her indirect feminist critique. I examine her first novel, *Dust* (1921); four of her later nonfiction works, *What the Editor's Wife is Thinking About* (1924), *Talks with Joseph McCabe and Other Confidential Sketches* (1931), *Three Generations*

of *Changing Morals* (1936), and *Jane Addams as I Knew Her* (1936); as well as a number of personal documents and archival sources. Ultimately, this is a search for those moments, to use Burke's reading of Milton as an example, where the author "include[s] what [s]he would have had to exclude, if reduced to a conceptually analytic statement" (5). After all, despite her success as one of the best-selling authors (and co-owners) of one of the world's largest private publishing houses, Haldeman-Julius wrote her feminism subversively, under the watchful eye of her abusive husband, editor, and publisher. Haldeman-Julius attempted the impossible: to write against the one person who represented her best access to a reading audience.

Haldeman-Julius's public attempts at self-disclosure/avowal are made in metonymic rhetorical constructions she considered less threatening to her husband due to their publicity (and his assumption of personal decorum that came with that publicity). While burgeoning mega-publisher Emanuel Haldeman-Julius no doubt held a profit motive for publishing his wife's work (he was, after all, called the Wrigley and the Henry Ford of publishing before losing much of his fortune in the stock market crash of 1929), his personal feelings about her resistance are more difficult to ascertain, but since his wife published tens of thousands of books,¹¹ her popularity may have trumped any of Emanuel's personal reticence, and her rhetorical subtlety helped keep the message palatable. This work attempts to stand in the gap between history and subjectivity, personal motive and public writing, feminist opposition and compulsory social constraint.

¹¹ Emanuel Haldeman-Julius documented his wife's success (to a small degree), along with that of other authors who wrote about sex and gender, in his first autobiography, *The First Hundred Million* (1928). Documenting the success of his Little Blue Book advertising strategy and his subsequent insinuation into the homes of millions of Americans, Emanuel included numbers of certain categories of books published up until his autobiography was printed. Marcet Haldeman-Julius's Little Blue Book *Why I Believe in Companionate Marriage* alone sold 64,000 copies before 1928, and reprints of *What the Editor's Wife is Thinking About*, under various titles, approached 20,000 copies sold. These were not her only big sellers, most of which came in the middle to late 1930s.

Situating Marcet Haldeman-Julius

After her 1916 marriage to Emanuel Julius, who had recently moved to town to take an editorial position at the local socialist weekly, Haldeman-Julius's notion of ideological place shifted, as she added to her own intellectual milieu the fervent socialism of her husband and his associates. The spirit of socialism abounded in Girard, Haldeman-Julius's hometown and the county seat of Crawford County in the southeastern part of Kansas. With such notable friends and associates as Mother Jones, Eugene Debs, Upton Sinclair, and Clarence Darrow all coming often to Girard and writing for *The Appeal to Reason*,¹² which was, by 1916, the world's largest socialist weekly, Haldeman-Julius turned, with caution, to the radical left. Indeed, before World War I, socialism was contagious in southeast Kansas. According to one socialist comrade present in the town square in May 1908 to hear Eugene Debs give his first speech as the socialist candidate for president, "one can fairly feel the spirit of that world-wide brotherhood which we call International Socialism" (Shore 184). Sometime "or other," Elliot Shore, Julius Wayland, the editor of *The Appeal to Reason*'s biographer, explains, "the comrades all come to Girard" (184). Haldeman-Julius's turn to socialism was, it seemed, especially in light of her affiliation with the *Appeal to Reason*, unavoidable.

Helping run the *Appeal* was difficult at first for Haldeman-Julius. In a letter fragment to Addams, presumably from the fall of 1916, Haldeman-Julius's reticence about her newfound marital and socialist responsibilities appears. Foreshadowing the ambiguous identity-spaces she will come to inhabit, she writes,

[H]ere I am, a good Republican, planning and working for the success of the
largest and most powerful Socialist paper in the U.S.A., the largest and one of

¹² Haldeman-Julius would begin incrementally purchasing the *Appeal to Reason* in 1921, eventually turning it into the Haldeman-Julius publishing company.

the most powerful in the world I guess. . . . When the [editorial] board meets, and when Louis and Manuel and I discuss things, I seem to quit being myself and see things altogether as Manuel's wife. For the time being I accept his point of view and see everything from that point of view. . . . Just what effect it is going to have on my character, I can't say.

Long predating her marriage into the socialist elite, Haldeman-Julius's radicalism had been developing through her affiliations with Addams. As a girl, Haldeman-Julius spent summers at Hull House, Addams's famous settlement community located on Chicago's bustling Halstead Street. Hull House was founded only two years after Haldeman-Julius's birth, and the two grew up together, both, as it seemed, in Addams's shadow.

Haldeman-Julius's relationship to Jane Addams was complicated by her parents' unique history and personal attitudes toward the reformer. Haldeman-Julius's grandparents, Anna Haldeman and John Addams, married after the deaths of their first spouses, and each brought children to the marriage, settling on a nice farmstead in Cedarville, Illinois. The young Jane Addams became close friends with Anna Haldeman's youngest son, Henry, while the two middle children, Sarah Alice Addams and Harry Haldeman, fell passionately though secretly in love. When their love was made public, neither of their parents was comfortable with the idea, not because the two were stepbrother and stepsister, but because Anna Haldeman did not see Alice as equal to the worth of her difficult middle son. The two siblings continued their correspondence well into Harry's first pursuit of a medical education, which failed due to his emerging alcoholism (Bissell Brown 119). After John's death, the siblings wed, and Alice's influence served as a stabilizing force for Harry and helped him to facilitate and finish his medical education. Republicans, Harry and Alice eventually settled in Girard, where Harry

became the town doctor, the president of the local State Bank of Girard, and the owner of many of the mortgages in the area, mortgages his daughter would inherit, making her perhaps the town's richest citizen (Bissell Brown 118-19). However, unlike Alice, who loved and admired her famous sister, Harry Haldeman saw Addams's work at Hull House as unimportant and idealistic, an attitude famously shared by his mother, her stepmother.

During summers at Hull House, Haldeman-Julius cared for, bathed, dressed, educated, structured events for, and learned from the children of Chicago's new immigrants, who brought their children to the settlement house during the day so they could seek the low-paying industrial jobs that were springing up all over the city in the late nineteenth century. Wanting more of her aunt's attention than she was given, Haldeman-Julius fed herself on a healthy diet of work and idealism but was also plagued by a bit of growing skepticism regarding Addams's long-term effectiveness in Chicago.¹³

As she recalls in her book *Jane Addams as I Knew Her*, Haldeman-Julius began to suspect, as her intellect sharpened, that all was not quite what it seemed at Hull House. Of course, there were

Interesting activities, interesting people, interesting revelations—yet mingled with them was mingled a bit of groping criticism. When I visited my earlier playmates, with whom I had kept up friendship, I found that their living conditions were unaltered. As Hull House had grown, with all its usefulness, its building had displaced the old and unsightly landmarks of the neighborhood; but, while some of the tenements of the poor were pushed a little farther away, they remained essentially the same. . . . [T]here was a basic

¹³ Haldeman-Julius's skepticism is marked, slightly at least, with her father's scorn for Addams, as well as Haldeman-Julius's adult desire to attain a public position about from and to some degree against Addams's.

. . . crowdedness and sordidness . . . [a basic] unchangingness of poverty.

(*Jane* 7)

While she appreciated Addams's progressive desire for effectiveness, Haldeman-Julius, writing in 1936, rhetorically situated herself against Addams and in doing so stood out as one of Addams's only critics of that decade. In *Jane Addams as I Knew Her*, Haldeman-Julius regularly failed to acknowledge the true extent of her aunt's radicalism, as was the trend in the public media at the time. By 1936, the ire that had surrounded Addams in the teens and twenties had been replaced by a sort of idol worship that caricatured and reified Addams's image. Her name, previously written in lists of America's dangerous radicals, had come to adorn popular ladies' magazines.

Republicans in Girard considered Addams a saint, despite her radical views, and boasted of their town's ties with Addams and her work, despite her growing up at Cedarville (an estate Haldeman-Julius would eventually inherit). This image was beatified in Girard and other Midwestern locales, perhaps partly due to Addams's own rhetorical savvy. She was not one to publicly repudiate such a characterization. This image beleaguered friend and fellow Hull House resident, Florence Kelley—a radical socialist and friend and translator of Friedrich Engels—who “was the only resident who ever made fun of ‘Sister Jane’” and of her image as a chaste, saintly woman. ““Do you know what I would do if that woman calls you a saint again?” she once asked Addams. ‘I’d show her my teeth, and if that didn’t convince her, I would bite her’” (Sklar 183). Addams's national star demonstrated (however misinformed) the ideal of Victorian social hope embodied in female form.

Addams, ever a conscientious rhetor, played well to such audiences. On a 1912 visit to Sarah and Henry Haldeman in Girard, Addams spoke in a neighboring town on the topic of the

modern woman. A May 13, 1912 article in the *Pittsburg* [Kansas] *Daily Headlight* reprinted her speech. In it, she said, much to her niece's chagrin, that the

modern woman as pictured in the newspapers is a myth. . . . The modern woman would not be different from the ideal woman if she was given a chance. So many things have been taken out of her home, freeing her of responsibility, that she seems different. But the world-old instincts of her sex are too strong to change her, and through out all transitions of society she still is a woman. Return to her the [domestic] responsibility which she once had, and you will find her to be the true woman still. ("Not Proud" 6)

This was a mold that Haldeman-Julius and many women of her generation wanted to throw off.

In *Three Generations of Changing Morals*, Haldeman-Julius historicizes/criticizes Addams's generation, solidifying her own rhetorical and autobiographical position against it. Haldeman-Julius clearly and publicly reified her aunt in order to create her own rhetorical position. While not alluding to Addams specifically in this text, her ghost is present when Haldeman-Julius articulates that she has "more than a spectator's understanding of the earlier . . . generation" and that she sees individuals as "the keys that unlock for me the composite mind of each period" (*Generations* 3). According to Haldeman-Julius, the women of Addams's generation regarded themselves as "home-maker[s]—as wi[ves] and mother[s]," this status seeming "ordained and essential" (5). This preordination, according to Haldeman-Julius, "stemmed from a deeper act of submission" to men and the masculine order and a belief that "men and women were separate classes, almost separate races, divided in their rights and obligations by unalterable decrees of nature" (5-6). Addams's generation, and, for Haldeman-Julius, mistakenly, Addams, were submissive to patriarchal notions of women's roles.

In 1915, when Marcet Haldeman-Julius had her first child with would-be mega-publisher Emanuel Julius, she built an enormous, stately home just outside of town, naming the house and surrounding grounds Bridleway Farm. The home was sprawling, and its acreage included barns for horses, garages for cars, vast vegetable gardens, a stainless-steel in-ground swimming pool, and, perhaps most important of all for the young Kansas native, a stage. Though Haldeman-Julius's work as an actress had taken her all over the country and placed her in the company of some of the most notable actors, actresses, and directors of her day – including Franklin Sargent and Cecil B. DeMille – audiences and directors soon tired of the young woman, who, in her late twenties, appeared too advanced to play the ingénue and who, as a handsome but plain-faced brunette, lacked the features necessary to play the vamp. Indeed, upon her premature exit from Bryn Mawr in 1908, despite her aunt Jane Addams's ties to its president, M. Carey Thomas, her mother, Sarah Alice, president of the State Bank of Girard, funded her daughter's exploits at Sargent's American Academy of Dramatic Arts, hoping the acting business and the big city would swiftly, if not summarily, overlook her daughter's talents and leave her with no option but to return to her rightful home on the plains, where, her mother pined, she would take over the family bank and preside as the richest woman, perhaps the richest citizen, in town. Her experience in the theater, especially her long and complex struggle against positivist Delsartean semiotics of performance, created the platform for Haldeman-Julius to develop, in her early thirties, her own written rhetorics of indirection, when she, as a wife and mother, became the subject of abuse by her husband, editor, and publisher, Emanuel Haldeman-Julius.

Karlyn Kohrs Campbell has argued that “[a]nalysis of persuasion by women indicates that many strategically adopted what might be called a feminine style to cope with the conflicting demands” of the public sphere and that this “style emerged out of their experiences as

women and was adapted” to audiences (12). Indeed Campbell’s recovery of nineteenth century feminist rhetoricians depends upon this notion of style as embodied in a generalizable performance of “other,” adopted from the common perception that most women from 1840 to 1900 who spoke in public negotiated the notion of gender performance, in particular avoiding the deadly equivalence with “the masculine” (11). For her, female rhetors’ feminine style grew out of awareness of structures and preconditions of speaking or writing “in the public sphere” (11). In short, masculinity as an active, dominating force has prefigured feminist responses to personal domination, and traces of its residue – feminist indirect rhetoric – are evident in places where women negotiate future publics in coded or obverse ways. Locating these moments, as I do here with Haldeman-Julius, stands as an alternative approach to what Carol Mattingly has called feminist rhetorical scholars’ preference for appreciating “those historical figures who most resemble academic feminists,” feminists, she explains, who “share our investment in confrontational and assertive approaches – at the expense of others worthy of our attention” (101). Of particular importance is what Jane Danielewicz argues in “Personal Genres, Public Voices”: the fact that – even and perhaps especially in terms of the subversive indirect rhetoric that Marcet Haldeman-Julius creates — “[p]ersonal forms, as genres, depend for their coherence on the connection between the personal and the public” (421). Haldeman-Julius puts her early performance training to work in her later, more subversive indirect feminist critiques, puts to use “texts in genres with recognizable social functions,” like the gossip column, and turns them on their heads, making them vehicles for indirect self-avowal (421).

Learning Performance, Gesture, Motive: 1908-1915

Marcet Haldeman-Julius's arrival at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts in 1908 at the age of 21 differs from the traditional tale of the small-town Kansas girl's trek to the big city. Unlike many of her primary and secondary school classmates in tiny Girard, Kansas, Haldeman-Julius had tasted city life before, often summering-in-service in Chicago, working at Hull House, a community modeled after England's Toynbee Hall in its complete refashioning of traditional notions of charity and community involvement. Despite being the daughter of Addams' favorite stepsibling, Sarah Alice Haldeman, the young Midwesterner spent relatively little time with her aunt who, in addition to providing care for immigrant children and women on Chicago's busy Halstead Street, administrated the production of plays, scripted youth-club activities, and traveled to raise money to support the ever-expanding settlement. Their relationship grew as Haldeman-Julius reached high school and then college age. The trips began to take on more and more meaning for the young Kansan, and by her late teens and early twenties, the relationship flourished. As Haldeman-Julius recollects,

Aunt Jane at this period commenced to make room in the midst of her busy life for increasing attention to what I was doing and thinking. One of the things which I first definitely appreciated in her was the intelligent sympathy which she showed toward my wish to enter the theater. (12)

Addams's support helped convince Haldeman-Julius's parents that, after a three year stint at Bryn Mawr, she was ready to attend the American Academy of Dramatic Arts (AADA) in New York.

Performance held the young Kansan's interest, as she sunk herself deeply into the courses at the AADA, courses in Stage Business and Rehearsal with David Belasco, others on

Pantomime with Franklin Sargent, General Education, Dancing, Fencing, Character Pantomime, Voice, Make-up, and French (McTeague 79). Important for her later, mature rhetorical indirection, it was gestural technique at which Haldeman-Julius excelled; she absorbed much of the culture of the acting world as well and identified with it with a vigor that appears rarely in her life's correspondence. In a letter dated February 23, 1908, Haldeman-Julius announces to her mother that "I like actors and actresses better than any other one class of people, & I feel that when all is said and done, and differences cancelled, their standard is more my standard, their point of view, my point of view than that of any other group." She inquires,

Can you understand the heart of a bohemian? Please try to, and don't forget, that if the bright flame of life burns red and strong within me, close beside it, rises the white one of love for truth. I love my work so much.

Without a doubt, it was Addams's acceptance of her theatrical pursuits that encouraged the young woman. She recalls,

Struggling out of a stormy adolescence, I felt that the stage offered a medium through which I could express myself. This idea was unwelcome to my mother and in her tenderly firm way she was reluctant and disapproving. She discussed it with Aunt Jane, who joined grandmother in supporting my wish. Later I came to realize that this readiness to enter into the plans of youth and to help with an open mind in furthering unfolding desires for achievement in varied avenues of activity was one of Jane Addams' finest characteristics. (12)

Haldeman-Julius continues,

During the next five years, while I was in the theater, Aunt Jane and I saw a good deal of each other. She never came to New York without letting me know and I

visiting her dutifully at the hotel, the club, or the nurses' settlement where she might be staying. (12)

These visits led the two women to share insecurities that came with that public territory, where Addams's "rare searching for self-criticism encouraged me to confide myself of my own shortcomings in theatrical work" (12). "This," Haldeman-Julius continues, "led to a discussion of the problems as well as the rewards which an actress and a lecturer had in common. ... We chuckled over the discovery that we shared one peculiarity" (12). Interestingly, "[i]t was difficult for me to appear in a play or for her to appear on the lecture platform with a hat or any kind of head covering – although often enough we both had to" (13).

In an early February, 1908 visit, near the beginnings of their burgeoning intimacy, Marcet Haldeman-Julius chose to introduce Addams to one of her favorite – and perhaps the most distinguished faculty members at the AADA – Franklin H. Sargent, a former Harvard elocution professor. Sargent, along with Steele MacKaye, founded the American Academy of Dramatic Arts¹⁴ in 1884. The two worked side by side, with MacKaye as the principal theorist of the movement and Sargent the administrative specialist who, much more than his associate, consolidated the school into a structured educational institution. Though Sargent was a student of MacKaye's and considered him his most significant influence, their professional collaboration was brief. In April 1885, as James McTeague explains,

The Lyceum Theatre went through a crisis that resulted in MacKaye's leaving. He was occupied with rehearsals of his play, *Dakolar*, and was literally barricaded inside the theatre until his show opened. It was hoped that the *Dakolar* would solve the financial ills of the Lyceum project. The students rebelled, supposedly

¹⁴ At its founding, the AADA was called the Lyceum Theatre School.

because of displeasure with the teaching methods; Gus Frohman was accused of taking \$33,000 in tuition money from the schools for the production of *Dakolar*, and the rest of the faculty, including David Belasco, were preparing to leave the enterprise for lack of pay. (48)

When, after a successful two months of performance, MacKaye took the play on tour, he heard that “he was no longer connected with the school and that ‘the School authorities [meaning Sargent] are now repudiating his methods’” (McTeague 48). This break is significant. As of 1884, Sargent and MacKaye had worked together for years, first as teacher and pupil at the Union Square Theater School, then as colleagues in the late 1870s at the Madison Square Theater School. The break had ramifications first in the structure of the school that Sargent envisioned and also in subtle breaks away from MacKaye’s Delsarteanism, fraught with mysticism, and a new emphasis on what James Narremore calls in *Acting in the Cinema* its “prescriptive, formulaic descriptions of actory poses” (53).¹⁵ At this point, in order to shore up his losses and keep the educational apparatus he was building alive, Sargent changed the name of the Lyceum to the New York School of Acting in October of 1885. It would become the American Academy of Dramatic Arts in 1892. Perhaps the most important repercussion of Sargent’s break from Delsarte came in Sargent’s rejection of the pre-modern elements of Delsartean theory, its relationship to God, oneness, its mystical elements. Using his education in elocution, Sargent’s

¹⁵Delsarte believed that his “system points the fundamental unities of soul and body, through his emphasis on the body’s mechanical ability to point to larger truths and ultimately to what he calls the unity of the “ontological, moral, and organic” (Delsarte 64). According to Robin Veder, Delsarte “believed that emotions reliably generated uniform, essential, eternal, and specific physical movements. His goal,” she explains, “was to study the innate postures, gestures, and facial expressions that revealed genuine emotions, so that actors and other rhetoricians could learn to convincingly and sincerely manifest those feelings” (821). As each movement, each position directly corresponded to a specific emotion or internal state, Delsarte’s vision for the semiosis of the body was, as Veder importantly reminds us, “semiotically ... motivated, not arbitrary” (822).

method was a pared down, mechanical, modernist semiotics of gesture, one that would eventually feel uncomfortably limiting to the young Kansas actress.

After MacKaye's departure, Sargent forwarded his vision of the Lyceum, pushing its students to meet the challenges and tastes of a rapidly developing critical audience. Sargent, for three decades, remained a major figurehead in the dissemination of his own, more modernist, version of Delsartean performance theory and practice, making him a tributary of a stream that encompassed almost all acting culture in the last two decades of the nineteenth century and the first two of the twentieth. As James Narremore argues,

Ultimately, the "Delsarte Movement" was so deeply embedded in the culture that a good many actors could be described as Delsartean whether or not they ever studied him – just as middle-class Americans once behaved according to Emily Post whether or not they actually read her advice. (53)

With the ghost of Desarte himself serving as the mystic guide, and with Sargent fulfilling the function of scientific practitioner, Sargent's own brand of Delsartism permeated the AADA and, increasingly, made Haldeman-Julius uncomfortable, her own sense of purpose, self, and motive pushing back against what she saw as constraining technical emphases on the strictly gestural elements of performance.

As Diane Davis explains, Kenneth Burke, a contemporaneous surveyor of the motives of great literary characters, scholar of performance, as well as the father of modern rhetoric, lifts his central concepts and language about motive straight from Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*. "Burke," she argues, "based his theory on Freud's, and the overlap is readily discernable"

(124).¹⁶ For Freud, as well as for the newly emerging, performer/writer/activist, motives were not always clear, even if their performance was. *In short, Haldeman-Julius's discomfort with Delsarte, the necessary (as she saw it) separation of the motive from its performance became, over time, a reminder of emergent domestic abuse and a recipe for its erasure. Divesting herself of it or not, though, Delsarte's system provides a basis for tracing the arc of the young Kansan's performance, motive, and indirection.*

A large part of Haldeman-Julius's work at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts consisted of learning how to translate this highly regimented, positivistic technique into the "act of genius" that Delsarte, MacKaye, and Sargent wished to see. In February of 1909, Haldeman-Julius wrote to her mother that Addams had come once again to visit the school, her niece taking the opportunity to introduce her well-known aunt to her favorites among the students and faculty. Haldeman-Julius relates that, first, she took Addams "to see Mr. Sargent, whom I stand in awe of," and, possibly due to the surprise of such a notable guest, "[he] didn't have much to say," offering, though, that "I was very faithful in my work & wasn't very emotional – ought to be more so." This series of letters indicate an important and continuous struggle that Haldeman-Julius suffered during her time in New York under Delsarte's modernism: the relationship between true, honest, complex emotion and what she considered the regimented frameworks these scientists of gesture constructed to convey them. It was a system she worked very hard to master but one that evaded her, left her feeling rather hollowed out and stilted. She continues in the same letter, "I have been sticking pretty closely to mechanics feeling that what I must get now was my technique, for it is so hard to master. – Feeling sure that a little later I could press

¹⁶ Interestingly, a large part of Haldeman's later publishing success came in the marketing of Freudian ideas, ideas that posed, as she was aware at the time, the undoing of the mechanical elements of Delsarte's semiotics of performance.

the button so to speak & let the golden light of emotion flood through me. Perhaps,” she recalls, “I have overemphasized the technique.”

Though the initial moments in New York and the study of drama inspired the young Kansas transplant with its bohemian flair, inspiring her to report emphatically her loathing of the “narrow pedantic atmosphere of college,” she continued to struggle to bring the emotional elements, the “truths” she sought as an actress, in line with the external mechanics she inherited from Delsarte and Sargent. In the end, though Haldeman-Julius worked somewhat steadily in theater for a few years, she continued to struggle against and to incrementally buck the modernist semiotic that she saw in Delsarte’s frameworks, though they provided for her the frameworks for her later developments as a writer and, ultimately, as an indirect rhetor. For, as she reported home in January of 1909, she felt a growing discomfort with many of these “objective” notions that were handed down by her instructors, notions, for instance, that insisted that “the reason we study the poorer classes is – Because – their emotions are more elemental & more easily separated.”

For a young woman who had grown up working amid the complex human milieu of Hull House, where immigrants were encouraged to write and represent their experiences and their feelings through literature, club-work, and drama, such obtuse and uninformed directives not only demonstrated the unfeeling and detached nature of theatrical instruction, but they also served as a blockade against truth itself, a blockade against self and internality. Haldeman-Julius valued the complex internality she saw at work in the writings of her aunt and her colleagues Florence Kelley, John Dewey, and George Herbert Mead, all of whom were working to liberate human thought from the static and oppressive dualisms of social inequality (in Addams’s and Kelley’s case) and the social/psychological self (in Dewey and Mead’s case), not to mention that

“Nietzsche, Freud, Bergson, and William James[s’]” influence on “introspection,” a more complex matrix for human understanding and expression, one that emphasized “*being* instead of mimicking,” had begun to creep into American consciousness (Narremore 60).

While her time in New York became more and more fraught with employment woes, Haldeman-Julius experienced a kind of hollowing-out. As she continued efforts to fulfill the expectations of male theater managers and directors, all the while honing a mechanics of performance she increasingly saw as not only mediocre and incomplete but also limiting, sexist, and self-erasing, Haldeman-Julius succumbed to a deep and lasting depression. Her disquiet was not aided by the fact that her theatrical work was never quite enough to pay the bills, and she found herself in 1913, at the age of 26, tired and well past the sunny years of youthful ingénue work. Her letters to her parents continued to ask for monetary assistance, each more apologetically than the last, each describing in greater detail the difficulties of finding work. In a 1913 letter to “My Dear Family,” Haldeman-Julius relayed that she “suddenly collapsed” and has “lost more weight.”

I got dressed, lunched, and went downtown [to look for a new part]. But I might as well have spared myself the effort for there is no use in looking for a job unless you put your heart into it [Eventually,] I got into my old stride of doing the offices. But not quite. I still felt as if the whole thing were an endless game. Scarcely worth the candle. But I did my best.

As parts dried up, Haldeman-Julius struggled with the senselessness of her career choice, particularly of what she considered to be the inhumanity that accompanies a life of not only imitation but of imitating ideals set by and for men. For the first time in her adult life, she

viscerally rebelled against the subtle, highly coded world of masculine domination – in particular its performative structures.

The path that remained was to regain her agency and to escape the mechanisms of self-annulment she was forced to internalize at the AADA; she had to write, as her aunt had done before her. Print, here, becomes a mechanism for self-attainment, self-avowal, but not only the attainment of self, its actualization, but also its assertion into some public. In her last two years in New York, Haldeman-Julius, with the help of vaudeville and film actress Lillian Concord Jonasen (known publicly only as Lillian Concord), Haldeman-Julius began to write her first book, one that she would self-publish in 1916 under the title, *Once upon a Time: The Faerie Doings in Cedar Creek Valley*. “At home again in the late afternoon I wanted like everything to write on my story but I had sworn [it] off for several days and I like to be able to keep faith with myself,” Haldeman recalls, “[s]o I picked out an interesting book of [William J.] Locke’s called ‘Stella Maris’ [sic].” She continues,

Presently I came to this passage:

“For perhaps the first time in his pleasant life he was overwhelmed ... by the sense of futility of his work, which every artist, actor, painter, and poet is doomed to feel at times. The painted faces of his colleagues, the vain canvas of the set, the stereotyped words, gestures, inflections, the whole elaborate make-believe of life that at once is and is not the theatre, - all this oppressed him and filled him with shame and disgust. It had no meaning. It was an idle show. He had given to inanity a life that might have been devoted to the pursuit of noble ideals.”

A simpler[,] better photograph of my own state of mind would have been impossible. And suddenly I realized, how much we all run to type. How little any of us, really have to say about ourselves.

“I have,” the deflated 27 year old wrote, “accomplished so little.”

This moment in Haldeman-Julius’s life is, for the historian of rhetoric, overdetermined. It represents, definitively, though, the moment at which Haldeman internalizes and then rejects what she sees as Sargent’s oppressively shallow, modernist performative semiotics, which, for the actress, offered less a map toward self and more an evasion of its very possibility. Despite her earnest and lengthy education and practice on the stage, it failed to represent the laboratory of social change so touted by her instructors. Whether she failed as an actress or rejected acting as a serious vocation is somewhat ambiguous, though the two are likely related. Though the Delsarte system “was conceived to aid the imagination in discovering the best means of express,” it had, indeed, the opposite effect (McTeague 11). The acting self, the performative self, as Haldeman-Julius internalized it at the AADA, was a trapped and isolated self, a self only tenuously linked to society through the fragile machinery of gesture.

Despite its deceptively child-like title and its overtly escapist themes, the book Haldeman-Julius worked on throughout her time on the stage in the early teens fairly echoed with themes of entrapment and estrangement from community. The story is fashioned somewhat as a loose allegory that follows a little girl and boy, Faith and Freedom, as they struggle against imprisonment and enchantment by a corrupted (or confused) political leader – a peacock, no less – with a penchant for audacious showmanship and vane disregard for others. Though her writerly craft is incipient at this stage, Haldeman-Julius’s early work is hugely important in helping trace the development of her social conscience within and against questions of rhetorical

power and authenticity. That the young actress felt captured within the spotlight was clear in her portrayal of several of the characters. Of a sylph, a fairy-like captive in the book, her captors explain

She used to bring the dew each morn,

Until the day her wing was torn.

She wept; we tasted of her tears!

Such a drink had not been ours for years.

We caught her with a pretty net.

We're glad to say we have her yet.

We give her food and tender care.

We've made a chain for her to wear

And forged it to a log. (Haldeman, Faerie 46-47)

As with an actress, the sylph remains on display, tended to by her captors (the audience), who feast upon her tears. Performance, then, becomes an ambivalent critical area. For Delsarte and Sargent, performance is a place of agency, of figuring a better world or of representing social evils, of perhaps even stimulating social change. Inversely, performance is also conscripted and limiting, as the ties that connect the stage with the outside world of audiences and publics are someone else's. Though Delsarte was famous for his notion that "[n]othing is more deplorable than a gesture without a motive" (McTeague 13), Haldeman-Julius struggled more and more with the origins of those motives, that they lay in the characters, which, as McTeague explains, required complete submission. Especially under Sargent, "the actor is the servant of the character, and the actor's feelings must correspond with the character he is portraying" (62), and though this notion of acting is more supple than the mechanical renditions of the AADA and its

legacies, it nonetheless remains based on a relationship of servitude, on the limitation or complete subsumption of self. In searching for her characters' motives over those years under Franklin Sargent and others on stage, including DeMille, Marcet Haldeman-Julius, almost by accident, began to discover her own. Her struggle with her own performative subjectivity, the tension between her external context's demand for "appropriate" communication and her internal motive, would define her future as a writer.

Courtship, Publishing, and the Seeds of Indirection: 1915-1919

Upon hearing of her daughter's change of heart concerning the stage in New York, Sarah Alice invited Haldeman-Julius home to Kansas, promising her work at the family's State Bank of Girard, of which she became president after her husband's death in March 1905. Though following in the footsteps of the first woman in Kansas ever to function as the president of a bank (and "vying with Katherine R. Williams of Indiana for the distinction of being the first such in America," according to Eugene DeGruson) was nothing to balk at, the task lacked the excitement Haldeman-Julius craved (DeGruson, "Afterward" par. 2). She balked at the invitation and remained in the city for slightly over a year. Her mother, though, was ill and urged her daughter to move back in her final months but died before she could return. Upon Haldeman-Julius's return to Girard, a town of 3000, she became the town's wealthiest citizen. She had traveled widely in the United States with various theatrical troupes, performing with the Easton Stock Company Theatre in Easton, Pennsylvania, working as a Vaudevillian in Gloversville, New York, touring New England with Cecil B. DeMille's company, and working in *To Serve the Cross* in Baltimore, Trenton, and Montreal, *Ben Hur* in Baltimore and Philadelphia, and acting in various troops in Portland, Bangor, and Sanford, Maine. Perhaps because of her wide travels and taste of public notoriety, Haldeman-Julius's move back to Girard

in the early months of 1915 was difficult for her. As writer and critic Alexander Woollcott explained the arrangement in a 1925 *New Yorker* Haldeman-Julius retrospective:

A wise and gracious lady was Mrs. Haldeman, less celebrated in the outside world than her sister, Jane Addams of Hull House, but not less highly regarded in Girard. It is possible that she had small confidence in her daughter's career as an actress: it is certain she had great patience with it. To Marcet she willed the Haldeman fortune, with no stipulations dictated by the inordinate vanity of the dead. She left it all to her daughter with a single condition. Marcet was to enter into her inheritance only after she had dwelt for a whole year in Girard. If, thereafter, she preferred New York and the hard benches of the managers' waiting rooms, it would at least not be because she did not really know how pleasant life could be in Girard, especially if one lived in its finest house and in the Spring twilight could motor out along the new roads and look at all the newly planted fields on which she held the mortgages. (Woollcott 7-8)

Woollcott paints an idyllic picture of Haldeman-Julius's return to her hometown, explaining that the young actress went on to "her destiny: meeting and falling in love with Emanuel Julius, a young Jewish Socialist journalist who was hired by the *Appeal [to Reason]* in September 1915" (Woollcott 8).

Julius, in 1915, was a recent transplant from New York City, having responded to an offer from Louis Kopelin, a former colleague at the *New York Call*, who had himself been hired by Walter Wayland, the son of Julius Wayland – the paper's original owner and publisher. Julius Wayland's *Appeal* was, at the time of his suicide, the best selling leftist periodical in the United

States – reaching 750,000 per week the following year, but Eugene Debs’s defeat as the socialist candidate in that election; the loss of Wayland’s second wife in an automobile accident; and the anguish of being accused of “seducing an orphan girl, [then] taking her to Missouri where she was killed during an abortion,” an accusation that would lead to his prosecution for white slavery under the Mann Act of 1910, proved too much for the publisher (Graham 15). After successfully speaking for the working man’s condition for decades, after revolutionizing subscription practices, and after fostering support for many of the country’s socialist elite, including Debs, Upton Sinclair, and others, Wayland had had enough. In the suicide note he tucked into Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward*, he wrote “The struggle under the competitive system is not worth the effort; let it pass” (Graham 15). Wayland’s suicide proved, ultimately, the death knell of the *Appeal*, as his son Walter lacked what John Graham explains as “radical will or political sophistication” and who instead “attended almost exclusively to business details” (15). Knowing the paper needed to quickly regain its socialist chops, in 1913, Walter Wayland invited the *Call*’s Kopelin– who brought Emanuel Julius along in 1915. Kopelin struggled to understand the *Appeal*’s audience, which, according to Graham, was Debsian and differed significantly with Victor Berger’s audience in Wisconsin, where Kopelin honed his socialist publishing skills. (14-15).

Historians who have worked on Emanuel Julius almost universally paint him as a strong and avowed socialist and a confident, though formally uneducated, journalist who had worked at virtually all the major socialist periodicals of the day, including the *Milwaukee Leader*, the *California Social Democrat*, and the *New York Call* – from which he was called to Kansas and given a \$10-a-week raise. Andrew Cothran (1966), Dale Herder (1975), and Eugene DeGruson (1992) all posit Julius as a firmly entrenched socialist, driven by his unwavering belief in the

workingman's agenda, but not all scholars agree. More characteristically, I think, Julius was an opportunist who wanted, mainly, prestige, money, and power. In *Yours for the Revolution* (1990), John Graham elaborates on what in the scholarship on Julius is a singular – and, I think, the correct – interpretation of the man's character.

A political dilettante, a man who toyed with socialism and had no convictions that seriously challenged his own self-interest, Haldeman-Julius proved to have no commitment to the socialist movement and neither understood nor valued the *Appeal's* significance in the movement. (Graham 15)

Graham's emphasis on the nature of Julius's character is crucial to this study of his wife's developing indirect feminist rhetorical skill, *as it is ultimately under his dominion that Marcet has to learn to fight subversively against her husband's domination and humiliation through the mechanisms of public-finding and audience activation that their joint publishing house provides her*. Emanuel Julius's self-interest provides the backdrop and the complex and developing rhetorical situation in and through which his wife's performative rhetorics emerge.

As Graham continues, "Julius soon married Marcet Haldeman, Girard's banking heiress and niece of Jane Addams" and "Marcet's inherited wealth enabled her husband to buy first a third interest in the *Appeal* and finally entire ownership of the paper" (15). While the facts of the Haldeman-Julius's acquisitions are clear, the story of the couple's meeting is difficult to pin down. Though a finding aid at in the special collections at the University of Illinois, Chicago indicates that Haldeman-Julius had met Emanuel Julius, her future husband, in New York, no correspondence confirms that claim. It does confirm, though, that the two had lived for a short time in the same building in New York. Meeting in Girard, the two young cosmopolitans had much in common. It is the first time in any of her correspondence that Haldeman-Julius starts

talking about being in love; all other suitors up to that time are held at arm's length, but Julius's prolixity, writerly confidence, and background in socialist journalism intrigued the young woman, who had taken writing up as the kind of true and valiant pursuit that the stage could not provide her – writing had, by 1915, supplanted acting as Marcet Haldeman-Julius's vocation, despite her banking work. Without a doubt, from Julius's point of view, the marriage to Haldeman-Julius vaulted him, immediately, out of poverty, giving him not only an editorial voice in the nation's largest socialist paper but also enough money to leverage himself, along with his wife, its owner. Despite his newly acquired access to wealth – which, importantly, Marcet held in our own accounts for the first three years of their marriage—, Julius and his team could not save the *Appeal*. Wayland, Kopelin, and Haldeman-Julius failed “to redirect the *Appeal* and mobilize its readers,” a move that ultimately “pushed the paper into decline” (Graham 15).

Part of the struggle to maintain the paper's success came in Emanuel and Kopelin's editorial decisions surrounding World War I. Initially, like most socialist outlets in the nation, the paper maintained an anti-war stance, hiring Alan Benson (who would run for president on the socialist ticket in 1916) (Graham 15) and George Kirkpatrick as figureheads of that movement. Graham argues that it was with the passage of the Espionage Act and the Sedition Act (1917 and 1918, respectively) that led the editors to change course and proclaim a pro-war stance. This claim is only partially true, however. The actual reasons for the paper's momentous shift on the issue came in the personage of Emanuel Haldeman-Julius. First – before all else – Emanuel was a capitalist (no matter if this standpoint flagrantly disregarded his printed material), and anti-war socialist material was simply not selling. The paper was in a tailspin. Second, Emanuel himself heard in 1918 that his draft status had been notched up from Level 2 to Level 1, something he

fought initially but something he realized could provide a spectacle for helping to make him a celebrity: he could prove his bravery by supporting the war that his public knew he might serve in (despite fighting the draft board mightily – though silently – on the local and state levels). As Graham explains, the end of the *Appeal to Reason* was imminent:

The last issue of the *Appeal to Reason* appeared on November 4, 1922, but the paper had been truly alive only sporadically during its final years of publication. It was replaced by the *Haldeman-Julius Weekly*. “By improving one’s self,” Haldeman-Julius wrote as the new paper’s credo, “the degree of general excellence will be permanently improved. The *Haldeman-Julius Weekly*, hitherto known as the *Appeal to Reason*, will carry out a carefully wrought policy of individual self help and development through one’s own efforts.” For socialists, the irony was inescapable. The old *Appeal*’s understanding of the impossibility of even conceiving a self apart from historical and contemporaneous relations, of the practical necessity of mobilizing a people with a shared vision of economic and social justice, of an egalitarian world that could only be brought into being by mutual effort and caring for others, had dissolved into barren self-interest.

(Graham 16)

Emanuel’s “barren self-interest” thematizes Marcet Haldeman-Julius’s marital life and serves as a major motive for her ultimate indirect feminist writing, her sounding out for potential audiences, publics.

Immediately upon the paper’s acquisition, Marcet was thrown into a complex situation, one that encompassed her personal and professional life, drawing them into difficult relationship.

Despite her status as a well-known Republican¹⁷ and the former secretary of the Kansas state banker's organization (She had resigned in April of 1917 to take on a larger role at the paper and to care for the couple's first child, Alice), a position Haldeman-Julius was thrown into that was, on face, untenable. She explains to a friend she addresses as "Euterpe," in 1918:

I don't know whether or not you hear through any of our mutual friends that we bought a third interest in the New Appeal, the paper on which Manuel used to work and of which he is now Managing Editor. It is [a] Socialist paper – the largest, I believe, published anywhere. To thousands of people the Appeal is their bible. Manuel and Louis Kopelin, who also owns a third interest, swung the paper and a vast number of the Socialists of this contry [sic] to a pro-war policy and the National Headquarters of the Social Democratic League of America is now established here. Henry L. Slobodin of New York is the Chariman [sic], William English Walling the Secretary and Phelps Stokes the Treasurer. As Walling does his work from the Eastern office, Manuel is acting Secretary at this end and your humble sergant [sic] does half the work. It is some little job.

In this letter, Marcet Haldeman-Julius raises several issues. First, she is the manager of a paper that holds an ideological disposition to which she does not ascribe. Second, she understands her husband, to whom she has lent a significant amount of money to attain this paper, exists in a precarious position, *vis a vis* the draft. This matters to the young bride, who

owing to the fact that Louis [Kopelin] was drafted and Manuel is overworked, [is] doing the work of Associate Editor down at the paper so as to be thoroughly trained by the time Manuel, himself, has to go to war.

¹⁷ Haldeman's family had a long and well-established relationship to the Republican party, one that traced its way back to John Addams, Jane Addams's father, and his friendship with Abraham Lincoln.

Haldeman-Julius continues, “Running a county bank is like driving a comfortable reliable family horse, but running the paper is like riding a high spirited hunter and a ditch or fence appears every other minute.” That the paper exacts significant attention from Haldeman-Julius is of importance, not just on the level of labor demands but because it exacts a serious psychological price as well. It is in 1918, while running the *Appeal*, that Haldeman-Julius’s first cognitive split occurs, out of which her indirect rhetoric emerges. She continues,

Now, ... you must bear in mind that I am not a socialist. Also I think those who know me best would assert that I have never been a person to ride astride of a fence. I have been on one side or another, no two ways about it and everybody know[s] which side it was. Yet here I am giving a large share of my time to this paper and the Social Democratic League, giving Manuel whatever help I can on his policy articles, entering heart and soul into boosting this Mission ... and all the time voting the Republican ticket. I had rather thought some time back that I might run for our State Legislature this year and had I run I think I should probably have made it, because for one thing I understand thoroughly the technic of such a race.

Haldeman-Julius actually downplays her political ambitions here. Her intentions to run for office were, in fact, not just fantasies, but in her correspondence as early as 1915 with Jane Addams, she makes plain her intention to do so. And it is her marriage to Emanuel Haldeman-Julius that stands in the way. As she writes to Addams in March of 1916,

If I should not marry Julius and wished to, ... I could become a big woman politically in this state. It’s the truth, Aunt Jane, and I do know it. But I doubt if,

when I do marry Julius I can hold my own altogether. People here are not educated up to thinking of a husband and a wife as separate entities.

While she may have held a valid point here, as the larger trajectory of her marriage will demonstrate, Haldeman-Julius's ideological subjugation comes less at the hands of her community members and more at the hands of her husband.

By the time she writes to Euterpe in 1918, the particular challenges that running a socialist paper had begun to manifest in her correspondence. Having given up her political ambitions and feeling her own politics chipped away, Haldeman-Julius writes,

[W]hen we bought the Appeal I kissed all my political ambitions good-bye for ever and aye, for I should naturally never expect a favor from a party when I had an interest in the organ of another party. ... It is none the less dirty because ... the obligations are indirect.

Indirection, by 1918, became a way of life for Haldeman-Julius, as she increasingly lived out her husband's political obligations. "Just at present," she writes, "I am not very happy in that my mind is not on good terms with itself. I am unsettled, more so than many a person would be, because I am so unsure of myself." Here, to her girlhood friend, in a letter otherwise filled with friendly braggadocio and banal reminiscences, Haldeman-Julius calls for help. "With Manuel I am on the inside with the national group of pro-war socialists and I train with the inside group of Republicans of this country and I have reached the conclusion that *it is an impossible situation.*"¹⁸ She explains the difficulty:

Both Socialists and Republicans have accepted the fact that he is the former and I am the latter. None of them – except J. L. Shepard of the Executive Committee of

¹⁸ Italics added.

the S.D.L. [Social Democratic League] realize how much I work with Manuel or that lately our lives have stopped being separate. ... So here I am, Euterpe, thinking one set of thoughts and living and working for another. For the first time in my life I have very little use for myself. Always before I have been able to say far more truly than many people, far more truly than most people, "I live abreast of what I think." At the times when others may have had the least respect for me was when I had the highest regard for myself. But it is an old saying: Every man has his price. I guess it is pretty near the truth. Mine is my love for Manuel.

Because of her devotion to Emanuel and her emergence at the fore of socialist politics, Haldeman-Julius misses the irony of her situation: as her husband turns the *Appeal* against one of the truest American socialist truths (that socialists should oppose wars fought for corporate interests), Haldeman-Julius is hollowing herself out in the name of her husband's bastard-socialism, which has, at its core, a profit motive. This movement is particularly difficult as Woodrow Wilson, the president behind America's entrance into the war, was Haldeman-Julius's political science professor at Bryn Mawr – and he reneged on his opposition to U.S. involvement in the war.

To deal with her inklings of discontent, Haldeman-Julius turns to what she knows best as a mechanism to help her deal with the ambivalence of her situation: performance. She relates, "As myself I am one person and as his wife I am another – if you can understand what I mean[,] and it is a fact that I am absolutely sincere as both." Here, thanks to her training with Sargent in New York, Haldeman-Julius places herself, once again, in the position of the servant to her scripted character. In this case, though, her husband and his interests act as the playwright. She continues, achingly,

You know,... I am first and last always an actress. I don't mean that in a cheap way. I mean my mind functions in that way. It is my greatest strengths and my greatest weakness that I can not only see the other fellows's [sic] point of view, but for the time being can assume it as my own. Make it completely mine.

Remarkably, here, Haldeman-Julius's struggle comes in her editorial choices. In the draft of the letter at the University of Illinois, Chicago's Special Collections, the word "completely" is marked out. Reassuring Euterpe – and perhaps herself – Haldeman-Julius shores up her earlier outpouring, explaining that "having accepted his point of view, everything I write and all the work I do, I write and do with real sincerity and real enthusiasm," thanks to her performance training. "But I can drop it all as one does any character in the wings and become entirely myself again. I never mix the two because," she continues, almost quoting Sargent verbatim, "if one accepts certain premises – either his or mine – the rest follows logically."

Delsartean performance, the performance style linking gestures to motives, then, provides the crucial framework that allows Haldeman-Julius the flexibility and wherewithal to absorb her husband's point of view and responsibilities without losing herself, though, in her confession to Euterpe, her struggles are laid bare, as is her adoption of the rhetorical space of performance. "I am," she explains, "as happy in the composing room as I used to be on the stage." And, lest Euterpe think her old friend unhappy, she continues,

And furthermore whatever of the artist there may be in me stands aside and take a keen detached interest in all the subtle, dramatic nuances of my mental conflict. Not one of these, you may be sure[,] is lost upon me. Not one. As a writer I enjoy them all to the full.

“But underneath,” she hints, again with longing, “deep deep down in my innermost soul I am honestly troubled” by the need to “work my way out into a more consistent and tenable position.”

Marriage and Domestic Space: 1919-1921

As the couple’s financial success increased and their family grew into the 1920s, Emanuel spent more and more time at his office in town, leaving his wife to care for their new daughter, Alice, at the couple’s new Bridleway Farm outside of Girard. At the center of Bridleway was the main house, huge, white – set so radically apart from its surroundings – with such amenities as a swimming pool (in which Emanuel eventually and mysteriously drowned), guest house, and a built-in, fully operational stage (complete with lighting, trapdoors, etc.) to satisfy Marcet’s ongoing appreciation of theater. Emanuel continued to expand the publishing empire along with the budding American economy in the late teens. The publishing house began to print Little Blue Books, 16,000 word consolidations of great philosophy, socialism, economics, and history, as well as contemporary works by authors like Clarence Darrow, Upton Sinclair, Havelock Ellis, and many others; the couple became extravagantly wealthy and extremely well-known.

Emanuel became a regular at the Algonquin Round Table in New York. Sadly for his wife, though, as Emanuel’s income and publishing house grew, so too did his appetite for young women and his disdain for his wife, his propensity for affairs and emotional abuse increasing until everyone in the small town came to expect them. Behavior such as this humiliated his wife. It was well known in the Girard community that Emanuel “relished sex the way [normal people] relished a good cup of coffee” (Potts par. 42).

By 1920, when the couple's first novel, *Dust*, was being written, Haldeman-Julius began to notice a divergence between her hopes for marriage and its actuality. In only three years, her husband had built up the newspaper and was now becoming nationally known. Eventually the Haldeman-Julius publishing company – of which Haldeman-Julius was still a partial and important owner – would publish over half a billion Little Blue Books, printing up to 40,000 per day (DeGruson, "Afterword" par. 8). By 1920, Emanuel had tasted success. His lifestyle changed. He started keeping an apartment in town near his office. He began to travel extensively, make extravagant purchases, and carry on sexual liaisons with young women in the local community, including his secretary.

Emanuel left his bride at home to care for Bridleway Farm and Alice. To placate Haldeman-Julius, who bristled at his newfound liberties, Emanuel committed to writing a novel with her. Though both names appear on the book, Haldeman-Julius, as her personal correspondence at the time suggests, was the principal author. Her husband was brought in largely to offer plot suggestions and character psychology. The fact that his background was "almost antithetical to the rural Kansas society which *Dust* portrays" is one of many clues that Haldeman-Julius did most of the actual writing and thinking. While her commitment to the novel was complete, his was not, as he was otherwise very busy running the newly purchased newspaper and publishing company. Archivist Eugene DeGruson notes that the fact that the book is "deeply rooted in autobiography" suggests that it came more from Haldeman-Julius than Emanuel (DeGruson, "Afterword," par. 1). This was the case with all their novels. As Haldeman-Julius explains to her daughter in a letter dated April 15, 1935, concerning the last novel on which she and Emanuel collaborated, *The Best People*, a novel that was never completed,

[I]t is not fair that I should be compelled to leave unwritten a novel on which I have already done so much and on which E.H-J has not written a word (although he outlined the entire story and gave his “O.K.” when I finished blocking it.) ... I told him that I would do practically all the work if he would suggest and correct and write in here and there, but he said no, he didn’t care to; that I could have it.

By the time she was writing this book, Haldeman-Julius was firmly ensnared in an unhappy marriage, and she knew that exiting the marriage with her inheritance was virtually impossible. Therefore, she wrote subversively from within it. As another letter to Alice dated May 9, 1935, explains, Emanuel spent much of his marriage either aloof or “in a tirade.” Emanuel’s traumatic behavior makes writing itself an act of struggle. In another letter to Alice, dated May 1, 1935, she writes of the recurring feeling that “I shall never again write anything worth while.”

Coming out in 1921, *Dust* was greeted with critical and commercial success, even outselling Sinclair Lewis’s finalist for the Pulitzer Prize, *Main Street*. *Dust* sold out five printings in its first year and was translated into Russian, Swedish, French, and German (DeGruson, “Introduction” par. 12). The *New York Times* review argued that the “pitiless skill with which the wretchedness of all their lives is set forth makes it at times actually epic in its powerful, unsoftened realism” (DeGruson, “Introduction” par. 12).

The setting for *Dust* demonstrates what Taylor calls the “connection between place and identity” (Taylor 262). The novel’s county and town, both named Fallon, were reproductions of Girard and Crawford County. They were, like Marcet’s hometown, places invested heavily in agriculture and the mining of coal, lead, and zinc, “making the region an industrial center, not only of the state but of the nation;” for instance, by 1885, Crawford County was second behind Belgium as a producer of lead and zinc (DeGruson, “Introduction,” par. 15). The mining

industry eventually pulled immigrants from over fifty nations into the state. The Haldeman-Juliuses chose the fictitious name Fallon from a Socialist colony they financially co-sponsored that was started in Nevada during the First World War (DeGruson, "Introduction" par. 1). According to DeGruson, the town's name in the novel "served as a subtle memorial for the utopian Nevada community which had intrigued such well-known authors as Aldous Huxley and Carey McWilliams" (DeGruson, "Introduction" par. 1).

In addition to the physical and cultural geography, the protagonist of the novel, Rose, carries important aspects of her author, especially in regard to the debasement enforced upon her by her husband Martin, a relentlessly cruel, hard-working, and very successful farmer. Both Martin and Emanuel were devoted to their work, and each of the families suffered for it. Only Emanuel, though, twisted the knife further with his recurrent philandering and coldness toward his wife.

Dust demarcates, autobiographically, exactly where and how Haldeman-Julius's hope failed, smothered by her husband, exactly the places, for a woman, where the horizon of expectation yawns over a great chasm of personal indignity and social inequality.

In *Dust*, Rose Conroy, owner and editor of Fallon's (read *Girard's*) weekly newspaper, functions as Haldeman-Julius's doppelganger and a site of autobiographical resistance. Through Rose, Haldeman-Julius plays out her experience and critiques Emanuel's psychic violence. Rose fulfills two roles, having taken over her father's newspaper upon his death just as "matter-of-factly as she had filled her dead mother's place in the home" (Haldeman-Julius, *Dust* 42). She had not even missed an issue of the periodical and, according to Martin, had taken it over with deftness and precision. "It even paid a little better than before ... chiefly because she had made the *Independent* a livelier sheet with double the usual number of 'Personals'" (42-43). Like the

“rest of the community,” Martin “had supposed the *Fallon Independent* would be sold or suspended,” and he was impressed with the young woman’s leadership and independence (42). “Yes, decidedly, Rose had force and push. Martin’s mind was made up”; he would propose (43), “and a house should be his bait” (32). Like her authorial counterpart, Haldeman-Julius was chosen because she had talent and resources. Ironically, these talents and resources were the first things to be sapped upon entering marriage.

Martin entered the office of the *Fallon Independent* and proposed to Rose only minutes after considering her for a wife. “Here was the very person for whom he was looking. Rose Conroy, the editor of the better local weekly, a year or so younger than himself, pleasant, capable” (40). Because Martin had never paid Rose any attention before, she found his proposal bewildering, and she asked him why he thought she could make him happy. His response is the first of numerous insights into the mind of her husband, Emanuel, and it serves as Haldeman-Julius’s own autobiographical warning about the bondage of unequal marriages: “This was a new idea [for Martin,] – happiness” (46). Not one to think about such trifles as love, Martin’s was “an elemental materialism, difficult to understand, but it was a language very clear” to him (36). Martin, like Emanuel, was not a misogynist. He was short-sighted and selfish. The imminent torture of his wife was a product of his own cultural misunderstandings of women, his inherited devaluation of them. Marriage had nothing to do with love for Martin because love had to occur between equals, and women and men were not equals.

After he had left, she reviewed it a little sadly. It wasn’t the kind of marriage of which she had always dreamed. She realized that she was capable of profound devotion, of responding with her whole being to a deep love. But was it probable that this love would ever come? She thought over the men of Fallon and its

neighborhood. There were few as handsome as Martin – not one with such generous plans. She knew her own domestic talents. She was a born housekeeper and home-maker. It had been a curious destiny that had driven her into a newspaper office. (Haldeman-Julius, *Dust* 47-48)

Rose was a woman caught in a problematic historical place and time, a situation that resonated with Haldeman-Julius's own. Though capable, talented, and insightful (not to mention a writer and newspaper publisher), Rose, as the pages of *Dust* demonstrate, believes, like many women of her generation, that her "path of achievement lay from one door to another – from that of her father to that of her husband" (Haldeman-Julius, *Generations* 6). Here, the home actually structures women's path of acceptability and social efficacy. The home is the delimiting factor, an ambivalent Rosetta stone standing between two otherwise incommensurate languages.

Rose's decision to marry is born of material motives. She is tired of loneliness and does not think a "better" offer will come. She is getting very close to the age limit for respectable proposals. She knows that no other marriageable men in Fallon are as wealthy or handsome as Martin. Besides, he promises her a dream home. It is the home she cannot ignore. It is the home she cannot decline. In it her fantasies of fulfilled womanhood blossom, her proclivity for hospitality and warmth is exhibited. Martin's promise of a home is a decree, an impenetrable consolidation of patriarchy's power. It is a promised provision of calculated certainty on Martin's behalf. For Rose,

It wasn't as if she were younger or likely to start somewhere else. She would live out her life in Fallon, that she knew. There was little chance of her meeting new men, and those established enough to make marriage with them desirable were already married. Candidly, she admitted that if she turned Martin Wade down

now, she might never have another such opportunity. If only she could feel that he cared for her – loved her. But wasn't the fact that he was asking her to be his wife proof of that? It was very strange. She had never suspected that Martin had ever felt drawn to her. With a sigh she pressed her large, capable hands to her heart. Its deep piercing ache brought tears to her eyes. She felt, bitterly, that she was being cheated of too much that was sweet and precious – it was all wrong – she would be making a mistake. For a moment, she was overwhelmed. Then the practical common sense that had been instilled into her from her earliest consciousness, even as it had been instilled into Martin, reasserted itself.

(Haldeman-Julius, *Dust* 48)

Why does Rose go through with the marriage? Is she ignorant? Uninformed? For Haldeman-Julius, Rose's choice represents the ideological strictures that women of her generation suffered under. Haldeman-Julius argued in *Generations* that the "scheme of living was marked out for [women of her generation] with a rigidity that had never been the case with man except under systems of slavery and feudalism" (Haldeman-Julius, *Generations* 6). Here, Rose negotiates marriage in the hopeful and naïve manner of Addams' ideal woman, choosing not to listen to her more sensible inner voice. Rose, Haldeman-Julius's autobiographical face, enters into marriage knowing or at least suspecting that she would be trading her financial and emotional independence for a strange new currency that measured her "economic and social value" only in relation to her status as a "chaste wife" (Haldeman-Julius, *Generations* 7).

After all, perhaps he was right – the busy people were the happy people. Many couples who began marriage madly in love ended in the divorce courts. Martin was kind and it would be wonderful to have the home he had described. She

imagined herself mistress of it, thrilled with the warm hospitality she would radiate, entertained already at missionary meetings and at club. At least, she would be less lonely. It would be a fuller life than now. What was she getting, really getting, alone, out of this world? She and Martin would be good partners. (Haldeman-Julius, *Dust* 48-49)

Rose's ambivalence in this scene is evidence of good judgment. She seems to intuitively understand the limitations of a domestic sphere centered on Martin. The author colors the moment with such palpable reticence; it feels as though Rose is knowingly trading her whole existence as a person for this tragic farce, for this marriage to a man who does not love her and cannot respect her. Her loss is dear. "It was never granted," after all, "that a mother and wife had, even within this restricted scope, rights as well as duties" (Haldeman-Julius, *Generations* 6). Men, as Haldeman-Julius came to acknowledge later, "dominated both [the public and private] spheres" (6).

Upon the promise that her dream house will be built soon, Martin invites Rose to move into his little shack immediately after their nuptials. Martin's shack is dirty, small, and unkempt, and it greets Rose like an open mouth, mocking, threatening to steal the joy she hoped for in marriage. "[S]he told herself hotly that it was not the dirt nor even the desperate crassness that was smothering her joy. It was the fact that there was nowhere a touch to suggest preparation for her home-coming" (Haldeman-Julius, *Dust* 56). Rose is devastated, upon stepping into Martin's cabin, because "Martin had made not even the crudest attempt to welcome her" (56). Martin's lack of preparation was a message for Rose, a sign of her lack of importance in his life; the lush promises of material comfort and womanly surroundings belied Martin's obvious lack of love for Rose. "Tears pushed against her eyelids," on the first day of her marriage, on the day of her

homecoming; “[h]er new life was not going to be happy. Of this she was suddenly, irrevocably, certain” (57). Rose’s acknowledgement that her marriage was a mistake was immediate, and her husband’s response was equally clear. When the author lets the reader inside Martin’s consciousness, we hear him admit that he

had let the habit of obtaining whatever he started after get the better of him. Even today he could have drawn back from this marriage. But, he had sensed that Rose was about to do so herself, and this knowledge had pushed his determination to the final notch. (Haldeman-Julius, *Dust* 59)

The bond that Rose thought held them together was immediately and clearly nonexistent. “Intuitively Rose understood that their first evening and night foreshadowed their whole lives” (Haldeman-Julius, *Dust* 65). Rose’s hope for her home, a context in which she could be happy despite her husband’s coldness, maintained her. She told herself that everything “would be so different ... once they were in their pretty new home” (65).

Joshua Price argues correctly for the import of the home in identity formation. The home is a place in which and through which “[s]ocial actors (husbands, wives, lovers, and so on) become enmeshed in deep ways in (depending on their social position) building a home, occupying it, providing it, having dominion over it” (Price 40). In a sense, the home “reads” the characters for us. It interpolates them. For women, the home can provide solace and a matrix of social signification. This is exemplified in Rose’s desire to play the hostess at the dream home Martin will build for her. In *Dust*, the home fills a void in identity formation and consolidation that the husband, due to his unfeeling distance, simply cannot. Regarding the creation of spaces as sites of meaning, Henri Lefebvre argues not “to embrace a representation that takes the effect

for the cause, and the goal for the reason why that goal is pursued,” as Rose clearly mistakes the house as a sign of Martin’s love (qtd. in Price: 51). Despite its feminism, *Dust* does not free Rose from responsibility of her confusion and lack of options.

Haldeman-Julius used Rose’s putative dream house as a palate on which her own psychic and emotional violence played out. Martin lures his wife to be into marriage with the promise of a huge, two-story country home with wide porches, cement floors, electricity, and all the finest furniture. The house becomes a privileged *topos* in the novel and works out as a central metaphor of Rose’s own psychic demolition. It becomes an effigy of Rose’s status as a woman, and it is dismantled piece by piece by Martin – even before it is built. The house is literally a site of autobiographical resistance for the author because “the dream house described by Martin Wade in his proposal to Rose Conroy ... is virtually identical to the Haldeman-Julius home,” and in so being it is a reflection of her own disintegration (DeGruson, “Introduction” par. 11).

Strangely, this site of dismantling is also a site of rebellion, of feminist protest. In fact, as she (or rather, Martin) disassembles the home in front of Rose’s eyes, Haldeman-Julius is “‘speaking out,’ bearing witness ... testifying to things that have happened” (Price 53). She is laying bare her own marriage. “Such a practice develops in the listener or reader a sense of the pervasiveness of violences not talked about ..., describes their character, begins a discourse” and establishes a liberating and emancipatory “sociality to the experience” (Price 53). The trauma enacted in the Haldeman-Julius marriage is represented in Martin’s destruction of *the idea* of Rose’s dream home, the context of her future identity, her future womanhood.

Martin trades the cement-floored cellar he promised Rose for a cement floor in his barn. “But when Martin began to discuss eliminating the whole upper story of the house, Rose

protested” (Haldeman-Julius, *Dust* 66). ““You won’t use it,’ he returned reasonably. ‘I’ll keep my word, but when a body gets to figuring and sees all that can be built with the same money, it seems mighty foolish to put it into something that you don’t really need” (66).

For Rose, Martin’s logic is difficult to argue with, but her loss is immeasurable. The house “had become so real to her, that it was as if some dear possession were being torn to pieces before her eyes” (67). Some of Haldeman-Julius’s own letters demonstrate a fear similar to Rose’s, a fear that her house and its identity-making capacity will simply disappear. In an undated letter to her daughter Alice, Haldeman-Julius explains,

I had the strangest dream that afternoon I dreamed I was climbing, climbing, climbing until finally I ... was very high up. I could look way down on ... all of Girard. All the roofs were off and I could see right down into every church, store, and school house. And [I could see] this room itself I went from [my sitting room] into my bedroom and it ... had been touched with beauty. Then into the bathroom. It had a deep sunken tub, and the walls, and floor were of marble. “Oh, I thought ... what has happened?” But when I went to go into the hall – it wasn’t there. Just these three rooms – high, high, high up.

The house was a metaphor for all the happiness Rose hoped to have in her otherwise barren marriage; it was supposed to be her domain, her place. Her possession of it transcended the immediacy of a domicile and promised an identity-making space. Though couched in tactile terms of farm merchandise, the inventory of suppression echoes Rose’s internal state of consciousness. The following excerpt represents the slippery slope of misogynistic psychic violence:

This principal concession obtained, other smaller ones followed logically and rapidly. The running water and bath in the house were given up for piping to the barn, and stanchions – then novelties in southeastern Kansas. The money for the hardwood floors went into lightning rods. Built-in cupboards were dismissed as luxuries, and the saving paid for an implement shed which delighted Martin, who had figured how much expensive machinery would be saved from rust. When it came to papering the walls he decided that the white plaster was attractive enough and could serve for years. Instead, he bought a patented litter-carrier that made the job of removing manure from the barn an easy task. The porches purchased everything from a brace and bit to a lathe from the new tool-room and put the finishing touches to the dairy. The result was a four-room house that was the old one born again, and such well-equipped farm buildings that they were the pride of the township. (Haldeman-Julius, *Dust* 72).

Dust inverts the relationship between the external world and the internal one. Rose's inner life is taken piece by piece as her dream home is continually gutted and her husband's farm is outfitted with the newest equipment and buildings. Rose is left in essentially the same shack that shook her on her first day of marriage. She returns to the shack and its anxious truth of her unwelcomeness in Martin's life.

Since domestic vocabularies and visions of domestic space have served to create "ideologized center[s] of intimacy," the destruction of home-as-psychic-space reeks of emotional violence (Price 55). There is no doubt that such violence existed between Emanuel and Marcet Haldeman-Julius and that Haldeman-Julius used *Dust* as a sounding board, as a location to speak out about the injustices heaped upon her in marriage. Rose's ambivalence in the novel, her

refusal to leave Martin, for instance, reeks of a similar ambivalence that comes, often, when women invest in the home and see its failures as their own. “The ideology of home works in another way” as well, for Price, who argues that, for some women, “[h]ome is supposed to be a *safe* place that women are able to construct. Violence, then, in itself signals a failure – their failure – to construct a safe home” (Price 55). As Rose denies Martin’s violence by staying, as Haldeman-Julius denies Emanuel’s violence by staying, Price argues, these denials “can be seen as [the] denial of failure, as a way of holding on to their identity as homemakers, as competent to their task” (Price 56).

In her nonfiction writing, Haldeman-Julius used space as a trope for psychic violence as well. In her Little Blue Book *Talks with Joseph McCabe and Other Confidential Sketches*, Haldeman-Julius described the differences between her study and her husband’s. The differences marked the fault lines of gendered inequality and the unfair burdens of sacrifice forced upon women that are very similar to the ones she writes about in *Dust*. She began her spatial critique tepidly, by discussing the similarities of between their studies.

EH-J’s library is exactly above my study. The two rooms, which stretch the length of the house on its north side, are practically the same size, and the editor’s fireplace, which like mine, holds crackling four-foot logs all winter, is directly above my own. (Haldeman-Julius, *Talks* 93)

“But there,” she told her readers, “all similarity ends,” seemingly calling readers attention to the need for, as Virginia Woolf would call it a few years later, *A Room of One’s Own* (1929). (Haldeman-Julius, *Talks* 93).

Instead of the scuffed, plain brown linoleum that adorns my floor, a beautiful oriental rug, that it took E.H.-J. hours to select in Chicago, receives his august footfalls. Instead of my little portable Victrola to which the children dance ... is the wonderful new combination Orthophonic Victrola and radio. In place of the battered, folding bridge tables on which I write and from which my cherished manuscripts are swept ruthlessly to make way for games ... or the literary inspirations of the juvenile members of the household, a massive, long, carved Old English table, awaits in spotless expectancy to receive on its flat top the editor's apothegms and sparkling sentences. Instead of my worn typewriter which so many little fingers constantly use, is a darling little Corona which must never, never, no absolutely *never* be touched by anyone by E. Haldeman-Julius himself ... But the biggest difference of all this: that what is in the editor's library is his, while what is in my study is everyone's. (Haldeman-Julius, *Talks* 93)

The wife becomes a substitution for the house itself. She has no internal or sacred space. She is up for grabs. Everything that Emanuel owns, writes on, and operates around is the best, but more importantly, all that is Emanuel's is only his, while all that belongs to Haldeman-Julius "is everyone's." Like Rose, Haldeman-Julius's space is gutted and circumvented by her husband and his desires, distance, and psychic violence. "Intimacy is – or can be – a place of fear," or in the case of Haldeman-Julius and Rose, a place of pain and loneliness (Price 57).

Haldeman-Julius's house is her husband's house, despite the fact that her money bought it, and Rose's house is her husband's house, despite the fact that it was promised her as a marital incentive. In both cases, the etymology of the domestic, "that place of man's dominion," casts a shadow over the women who occupy it. By scripting space as she does, Haldeman-Julius speaks

out, in 1921, in a way that questions the traditional production of the home as safe. She speaks out strongly about the damage it does.

[F]or months, after [Rose] was settled in the new little house, her eye never fell on the space where the fireplace should have been without a bitter feeling of revolt sweeping over her. She never carried a heavy bucket in from the pump without thinking cynically of Martin's promises for running water. As she swept the dust out of her front and back doors to narrow steps, she remembered the spacious porches that were to have been; and as she wiped the floors she had painted herself, and polished her pine furniture, she was taunted by memories of the smooth boards and the golden oak to which she had once looked forward to happily. This resentment was seldom expressed, but its flame scorched her soul.

(Haldeman-Julius, *Dust* 74)

As Rose conveys later, though, "It was not that alone which had crushed her. It was his ceaseless domination over her, the utter subjugation of her will, her complete lack of freedom" (151). Rose's former hopefulness about marriage and domestic space colors her like a scar.

The home as site and method of identity production and the violence of that stolen bespeaks a new way of seeing and heralding a feminist message, a framework produced by what Karyn Freedman calls the "epistemological significance ... of traumatic experiences" and the importance of telling them (104). Haldeman-Julius and Rose trace the way that shattered worldviews can create and foster a rebellion that synthesizes the recreation and maintenance of a surviving feminist worldview. They both tiptoe between the falling rocks of the first sexual revolution, baring their bruises like messages. This marriage is an assault, an assault that is

conveyed via sexual difference in a space (the home) that is produced by the very function of that difference. And, for Haldeman-Julius, Martin and Rose's marriage is written against an implicit and highly oppositional ideal: the hope that "[m]arriage itself, instead of being a step into a closed room, is not an open door that may lead to all that is best and beautiful in life" (Haldeman-Julius, *Generations* 22).

Performing Silence in "What the Editor's Wife is Thinking About": 1922-1924

Emanuel's behavior devastated his wife as he continued to break her at home, even as she worked tirelessly to assure his public success in *The Haldeman-Julius Weekly*. Her status in the local Girard community, as well as the Haldeman-Julius's reading public, demanded a proprietary public face that went beyond her novelistic avatars. After *Dust* and despite its success, Marcet suffered increasing public humiliation. The publicity and frequency with which Emanuel carried out his numerous affairs (at an apartment he kept in downtown Girard, near his factory) increased steadily until Haldeman-Julius was forced to confront her husband because as his escapades with other women increased, so did his verbal and financial abuse of Marcet. In 1924, the year of Haldeman-Julius's cognitive break from her husband, Marcet wrote to Emanuel, who, by then, was spending only a small part of his time at home. The letter stands out from the couple's correspondence in its quality as an ultimatum:

You have your own life to live and must decide for yourself – as I must – what is right or wrong. I don't want to hamper you or make you feel tied in any way and if you want me to I am going to stay with you through everything. Bu[t] dear I think you will understand that I cannot keep my own self-respect if I let you com[e] to me from other women or caress me

with the thought in my mind that even so you caress young girls. I should be no better than the fast women themselves and by sanctioning the others I should be truly culpable I cannot & will not share you. My humiliation in my own eyes and in the eyes of A[lice] and H[enry] later, would be too profound. I could not bear it. I am proud, and already I have suffered past belief, I have burned & bled with the consciousness of insult and outrage... If you ever do come to me again it must be with a pledge in your heart that never again will you be with another woman. (Cothran 132)

Up until this point in the couple's marriage, Haldeman-Julius had looked the other way as her husband's infidelities increased. Her struggle with her desire to offer the face of a successful (both domestically and politically) woman increased as her own domestic situation worsened, and this struggle was documented in a column that Haldeman-Julius had written for the *Weekly*. "What the Editor's Wife is Thinking About" represents Marcet Haldeman-Julius's first public critiques of Emanuel, and it also represents her first successful attempt at public self-avowal in the mode of indirect feminist rhetoric, a rhetoric inspired by her performance history and one that separates her from other feminists of her day, either those in her mother's generation or the suffragettes in her own. The column represented, importantly, Marcet's attempt to co-opt her husband's audience in order to offer a subtle, sly, and coded critique of him and his behavior toward his wife.

In "What the Editor's Wife is Thinking About," Haldeman-Julius addressed, among other things, female readers' questions about her husband. It was the perfect forum for her to launch a veiled yet powerful critique of her husband. A Little Blue Book collection of Marcet's "Editor's Wife" columns was published in 1924 and sold well. Emanuel would not have published the

Blue Book had it not promised a large audience. He thought it innocent enough. He did not know his wife could manipulate language to transform her praise into critique, her description of her husband's character evocative of his faults and the harm he commits. Rhetorically, this book is fraught not just with notes directed toward the desire for liberation but normative declamations of her husband's character and propensities; these critiques are severe, though coded, in her performance of the character called "the editor's wife."¹⁹ Haldeman-Julius's character, undoubtedly, was created as a way to forward her husband's celebrity cache, though she turns the character on its face when, isolated by her husband, she powerfully and covertly pursues his audience. Here, Haldeman-Julius offers an example of how oppressed individuals negotiate the public and private elements of their worlds through symbolic means with the feminist rhetorician's sensitivity to the emotional (private/public) terrain to recruit a counterpublic out of an audience. It is, then, a germinal and potent feminist critique – exactly because it was designed to move beyond the passive reception of dull audiences to the activation of other audiences, audiences of which she certainly saw her very young daughter, Alice, being a part.

In his seminal work on the rhetorical situation, Lloyd Bitzer explains that "rhetoric is pragmatic; it comes into existence for the sake of something beyond itself; it functions ultimately to produce action or change in the world," and what it attempts to change, the itch to rhetoric's scratch, Bitzer calls the situation's "exigence" (Bitzer 4). What makes Haldeman-Julius's

¹⁹ Of the book Emanuel reflected, almost wistfully, in his 1928 autobiography *The First Hundred Million*, that "a book by my wife, Marcet, which was first called *What the Editor's Wife Is Thinking About*, and was reprinted from the *Haldeman-Julius Weekly* in response to numerous requests. This book sold well only at first," even when reprinted, to the Emanuel's chagrin, even as it was reprinted as *Intimate Notes on E. H.-J.*, with his wife totally removed. Her presence, it seems, was necessary to his own iconic status, despite his reluctance to admit as much. Emanuel did, though, confess, though, that the book, which had sold well early on and dropped off under the aforementioned second title, picked up when categorized under "Famous Women" in their marketing catalog. He explains, "As a last resort, during 1927, this book was listed under the classification Famous Women, as follows: *Marcet Haldeman-Julius's Intimate Notes on Her Husband*. This, amazing as it really is – I was quite flabbergasted when I learned it – sold 16,000 copies of this book in 1927" (*Hundred Million* 165).

situation intriguing, though, as I have argued elsewhere, is that *she attempts to write against the one person who represented her chance at an audience*. In order to offer a critique of her husband without relinquishing her chance at an audience, Haldeman-Julius employed what Thomas Huckin and others have called “rhetorical silences.” Following Michael Warner, I assert that writers like Marcet necessarily address “a public that does not yet [fully] exist, and finding their language can only circulate in channels that are hostile to it [which is, of course, the case for Haldeman-Julius], they write in a manner designed to be a placeholder for a future public” (Warner 130).

In contrast with her mother’s indirect critique of Emanuel in the public sphere, Haldeman-Julius’s daughter Alice serves as her principal private interlocutor on issues of Emanuel’s domestic misanthropy through a long and sustained correspondence, where the discussion of the subject serves to strengthen the bond between mother and daughter. The parallel between these two corpora is simple: the “Editor’s Wife” represents a public site of feminist resistance, and the correspondence represents a private site of feminist resistance (from mother to daughter). Both pursue similar ends, consciousness-raising, but their different rhetorical situations demand different interpretive frames from the researcher. My contention is simple: that writing through her husband (as gate-keeper of the public sphere) requires the use of rhetorical silence, while private epistolary does not. However, her private writing lacks the potential exigence of her public writing. Both are critical of her abusive husband, but one is more covert. One addresses an actual audience (Alice). One addresses a potential audience, a potential counterpublic, and *performs it into being*.

Recently, a handful of rhetoric scholars have begun to make strides in this direction (Farmer 2001, Glenn 2004, and Huckin 2010). Because of its absent-presence, silence is

difficult to approach, especially when silences are read as a “simple passivit[ies]” (Glenn xi). For Cheryl Glenn, silence-as-strategy needs to be accounted for, “particularly in our talkative Western culture, where speech is synonymous with civilization itself” and where “silence-as-obedience is frequently rewarded” (xii). In my view, Haldeman-Julius’s silence functions as textured critique of patriarchal power. A spoon full of sugar makes the medicine go down.

In “On Textual Silences, Large and Small,” Thomas Huckin elaborates six different kinds of rhetorical silences: Topical Silences, Conventional Silences, Discreet Silences, Lexical Silences, Implicational Silences, and Presuppositional Silences. Topical Silences are both the simplest to understand and perhaps the most pervasive, as every text leaves some topics out. Topical Silences can be used in what Huckin calls “manipulative” ways when “some topic relevant to a larger issue is omitted” in a way “that surreptitiously disadvantages the listener or reader” (Huckin 5). Conventional Silences are “genre-based,” like obituaries, which tend to “omit information unfavorable to the deceased” (6). These, too, can be used in manipulative ways, as Huckin explains, as in the case of American history textbooks that “sanitize the Vietnam War” (7). Huckin’s third type of silence is called a “Discreet Silence,” where information is omitted for proprietary or privacy reasons, or to “to avoid offending the reader” (7). Huckin’s example of the manipulative use of this type of silence is the “Bush administration’s executive order prohibiting photos of the military coffins coming back from Iraq and Afganistan” (8). Lexical Silences occur “at the most micro level of discourse” when “the choice of a word excludes other candidates,” as is the case with “hyponymy, where two words are similar in meaning but one is more general than the other, such as *walk* or *stroll*” (9). Since strolling carries with it a qualitative difference from simply walking, using *walking* silences “those features of *stroll* that do not inhere in *walk*” (9). Implicational silences, a very useful type

of silence for feminist critique, occur when one idea is used to create an inference in the reader's or listener's mind. Huckin explains, "[I]f my wife and I were preparing for a dinner party and she said to me, 'Are you sure you want to wear that jacket with those pants?,' I would infer that she disapproved of my attire," even though "she did not say so explicitly" (11). The last type of textual silence is a Presuppositional Silence, where "the writer omits relevant information on the assumption that it is already known to the reader," exploiting "syllogistic logic, sentence syntax, or cultural norms" (16). In a chapter entitled "A Repertoire of Discernments: Hearing the Unsaid in Oral History Narrative," Frank Farmer and Margaret Strain call these enthymematic silences, which, unlike Huckin's lexicon, links this type of silence directly to the rhetorical tradition. In either case, though, syntactically, "passive voice and nominalization" allow the "grammatical agent to be deleted" (Huckin 16). Of most interest to this study, though, are those presuppositional silences that presuppose cultural norms (think gender roles). Huckin uses the example of someone saying "I was here before you," their implication being derived from the cultural norm of standing in queue (17).

"What the Editor's Wife is Thinking About," like all Little Blue Books, is 16,000 words long. It is a consolidation (and editorial selection) of a multitude of columns written by the editor's wife between 1919 and 1924, and the editor's own hand in the canonization of these pieces is not to be forgotten. This notion makes sense, when one remembers the feminized elements of her generic choice, the "gossip column." Of course, the genre choice creates the potential for generic silences; this is to be expected.

What is most interesting, in terms of normativity, is that Marcet Haldeman-Julius, speaking to an audience of (mostly but not all women), has determined not only the critical message she wants to send but the methods for sending them. For her, the conventional silences

based on the genre itself provide a kind of entre into the question of her husband's character (and his capacity for abuse), but after that stage has been set, she proceeds, mostly, via implicational silences, which is understandable when one remembers that "What the Editor's Wife is Thinking About" was fashioned as a column but did not appear weekly, like a column in syndication. Instead, it appeared when Haldeman-Julius had something to say. Sometimes, considering her situation, she had positive or at least neutral things to say about her husband – how he looks riding his horse or in his white button down shirt, for instance – but sometimes she had more pointed things to say. In these situations, her evolving domestic situation provides context for the kinds of statements made and their exigencies.

Why are Conventional Silences important? Simple: they demonstrate the indirect feminist rhetor's ability to use written genres in tactical ways, operating on and underneath other kinds of silences and expressions. Of course, conventional silences are born, fundamentally, out of the need to get things done out of certain rhetorical situations. Like Haldeman-Julius's undermining of her husband's abuse through her descriptions of domestic space in *Dust*, this column again undermines her husband's abuse while making use of a feminized, innocent rhetorical situation: that of wifely gossip. Each genre (one literary, one rhetorical) allows for different modes of indirection, the first through characterization and emotional displacement and the second by taking advantage of the very expectations that define the feminized genre of the gossip column. What each proliferation of indirection has in common, though, is that they each demonstrate that indirect feminist communication *always has multiple exigencies*.

The beauty of what Huckin has done in creating his analytic is that each category is (and has been) deserving of analysis, and their potential for application extend, it is important to note, far outside the bounds of feminism as well. The first example of a conventional silence comes

early on. Haldeman-Julius, who eventually sold hundreds of thousands of Blue Books, who recorded Russian Socialism and family life for *The Haldeman-Julius Monthly*, explains to her female readership – an audience whose mailed-in questions the column addresses – the intricacies of her husband and his personality. This “feminized” (read innocent) genre works to cover certain kinds of silent assertions. “By meeting Manuel (as he is known to all his intimates),” she explains, you will at once submit to “his engaging cordiality – that is, of course, providing he is in the mood to pay any attention at all to you” (Haldeman-Julius “Editor’s Wife” 10). She uses a small Presuppositional Silence here, that which presupposes (1) that she is one of its “intimates” and (2) that intimacy means what it is conventionally (as dictated by the genre) meant to be, that Emanuel lovingly dotes on his wife, that he *pays* her attention in the sparse economy of emotional relationship. By itself, this assertion carries water, but in the context of a “feminized genre,” it gets strategically silenced. It is a statement covered over by the voice that conveys it. As she explains, letting herself off the hook, “I ask you, whenever was it in feminine nature to put ideas before individuals? Not in mine, I willingly admit” (7).

Continuing the “dishing,” Haldeman-Julius explains,

Women, Jean Dean (since you ask), are invariably drawn to him and their interest – at first at least – is as invariably reciprocated. That is, if they are pretty or charming. Being very sure of himself and of my complete understanding, he allows himself a good deal more liberty than does perhaps the average husband. (Haldeman-Julius “Editor’s Wife” 14).

Operating under the cultural rubrics available in advice columns, Haldeman-Julius’s assertion that her husband’s capacity for intimacy is challenged here and gets away with a subtle though

stinging critique. The notion that this silence is conventional comes from the fact that the genre itself silences it. It remains a speech act.

Haldeman-Julius's response to Jean Dean that Emanuel allows himself "a good deal more liberty than does the average husband" is a call for help and a critique of her husband's growing capacity for infidelity, though its status as nestled into a the feminized genre of gossip column "dishing" codes the radical publicity of this critique. The genre conditions and colors Haldeman-Julius's language in ways that allow her feminist critique to hide in plain sight. The genre allows Marcet to link Emanuel's sexual proclivities to his general air of self-confidence and independence. In another Conventional Silence, Haldeman-Julius explains: "Altogether I find him one of the most thoughtless, but most consolingly lovable, most exasperatingly ego-centric, but most pride-stirringly efficient of men" (Haldeman-Julius 14). Here, she voices the truth, but the depth of her statement is covered over like a generic sleight-of-hand.

Continuing her pattern of conventional silences, Haldeman-Julius raises the stakes. Indeed, Emanuel's liberties with members of the opposite sex are used instead to consecrate the love he must have for his wife. Indeed, without that love, he would give in, ultimately, to his attraction to the opposite sex. She writes,

Fortunately – providentially, I should say! – E. H.-J. has a delightful sense of humor. He certainly needs it. If only you could see the letters – and poems – which he receives week in and week out from the fair sex! Every kind imaginable, from readable, well-written – extraordinarily well-written ones – motivated by feelings of authentic kinship to just as many mash notes that often include offers of marriage. I am sure Mrs. Rudolph Valentino, Mrs. Ben Hecht and myself – not to mention numerous others – could have quaint sport, should

chance throw us together, comparing notes on the eternal feminine as it is portrayed before us in letters to our husbands. Yet, on the whole, in the case of E. H.-J. it is all rather forgivable for so much of his bubbling, alert and courageous self does get into his editorials that most of those who meet him there are drawn to him as irresistibly as those who meet him in the flesh. (6-7)

The propensity Emanuel has to naturally create desire in the opposite sex has a special effect here. By foregrounding his desirability, she has created a kind of alibi that covers over the plain fact that he has indeed responded to those who find him “irresistible” by not resisting them. Here, then, Haldeman-Julius has moved from a series of Conventional Silences to a more bold, Implicational Silence.

Implicational Silences, according to Huckin, induce inference in one’s audience and thus have special potential for coded feminist critique. Because the audience must do the work of filling out an implication, the writer can offer bold yet oblique claims. Implicational Silences as implicational claims abound in “What the Editor’s Wife is Thinking About.”

An early Implicational Silence in “Editor’s Wife” allows Haldeman-Julius to elide her own agential status as a feminist or as a critic. She “innocently” asks her female audience “whenever was it in feminine nature to put ideas before individuals? Not in mine, I fully admit” (7). Of course, this admission foregrounding her own powerlessness, she implies the great potential Haldeman-Julius’s arguments possess. Implicational Silences can often work in multiple directions or toward multiple exigencies at once, which makes them particularly powerful.

Returning to the power of the feminized genre of the gossip column, Haldeman-Julius capitalizes on the lowered expectations her editor/publisher has of her. So when she explains

that Emanuel's attention is "fleeting," and "is never held long by any one person," the implication of his disregard for her is clear, and the fact that this critique slips by his otherwise steady editorial marker is evidence of that (14). Through Implicational Silences like these, Marcet builds in a double-edged critique.

Haldeman-Julius's Implicational Silences tend to center on the theme of her husband's selfishness and lack of awareness and attention for her. To a question about her husband's preferred mode of transportation, Marcet explains that

last year Emanuel bought for himself in addition a beautiful Cadillac coupe which is the car he constantly uses. Like his library and his books, his little typewriter and pencil sharpener, his pen and his saddle-horse – it is his, strictly and exclusively. Never, under any circumstances, should I dream of using it – though often I am invited to ride with him, but I assure you always and only in the capacity of honored guest. (Haldeman-Julius 40)

Indeed covered in the saccharine language of a wife doting on her husband's love of fine things exists Marcet's relatively straightforward Implicational Silence that escapes her husband's editorial guise. It creates a kind of stark picture of a woman who is an outsider in her own marriage. Indeed, in her personal correspondence, as the years go by, she is constantly angered by Emanuel's tendency to drive only his mistresses in the little Cadillac coupe. She is an invited guest, existing on the periphery of her own life, not at the center of it (like her readers expect from her language and conventional decisions).

On the question of Emanuel's take on religion, Haldeman-Julius marks another characteristic of her husband's personality: his propensity to completely ignore things (or people)

about which he “is just not interested” (45). This section is immediately followed by what is perhaps the richest section in the book in terms of silences.

To the carefully-chosen reader question of whether Emanuel practices “free love,” his wife responds that “certainly as a young man – as most young men do, he approved and practiced (without any later regrets) complete [sexual] freedom” (48). Here, her sly orientation to his younger days covers over the fact that, as she says later, he still maintains that “twinkle in his eye” and his tendency to believe that “man ... is a natural-born varietist” (50). The implications are everywhere in the section and they speak to a very interesting effort on Haldeman-Julius’s behalf to use exactly the tools her husband uses to dehumanize her to level critiques against him that are so subtly coded that even he misses them – and in so doing, she reclaims some semblance of her own agency and humanity.

Sex does not end “What the Editor’s Wife is Thinking About,” though. And it seems rather clear through her final Implicational Silences that Haldeman-Julius wants to call out for companionship, to reach out into an unformed public for something or someone to grab hold of, to turn her audience into a supportive public of like-minded and similarly experienced individuals who have the potential for mutual solidarity and understanding. She paints her marriage, in these last pages, as a barren landscape indeed. To the question, “Are you charitable and how do you display it?” she writes, “Emanuel is constitutionally averse to people whose are broke [or I might say, *broken*],” covering her own isolation in Implicational Silences based on economic metaphors (50). She goes on in this section, her argument crystallizing that sometimes she almost slips from Implicational Silences into direct accusations about her marital situation, but even so, the Implicational Silence stands.

He will make almost unbelievable sacrifices for an idea in which he is interested, but he has the most appalling, total lack of imagination when it is a matter of a concrete individual in distress ... Just as surely as Emanuel's heart warms to the working man and his problems, just as surely does it harden ... to the man or woman with a long tale of woe. ... And often I find it ... disconcerting. (51)

Unwilling to position herself as one with a long tale of woe, Haldeman-Julius does something in "Editor's Wife" of great strategic import and linguistic felicity – without disempowering herself, without structuring her own relation to her domineering, cold, and philandering husband as one of victim, she launches a coded critique, a critique written to an audience of women who want to know about her husband. Through the use of these Implicational Silences, Haldeman-Julius makes her pain clear without ever having to own up to the kinds of failures wives whose husbands cheat on them are seen to have, failure to keep her man happy, etc.,. In the guise of painting an accurate image of her famous and "supposedly" desired husband, a man "far too kaleidoscopic and illusive to be more than partially compressed into columns," she instead paints, which much greater relief, the image of a marriage whose barren topography yields both a call for camaraderie and a warning to other women and thus functions as both feminist consciousness-raising and public or community-building.

Silence, of course, is not Haldeman-Julius's only means of feminist critique. Indeed, in her private letters (to her daughter, in particular) she often explains the situation in much greater and more explicit detail, detail that draws the purposive nature of her public writing into sharp contrast. Her letters to Alice in the 1930s are full of clear and accurate descriptions of Emanuel's behavior. A May 9, 1935 letter documents Emanuel's "tirade," where Emanuel treated Marcet's houseguests terribly, leading her to wonder why he gets into "such a flurry."

“Does he,” she asks her daughter, “construe the fact that they go right on liking me and seeking me out, through everything, as an indirect slur on him? Was Miss [Smith], perhaps, one of his flames? Did she weary of him? ... It was an amazing scene.” In another letter to Alice dated April 15, 1935, Haldeman-Julius recounts a scene at the breakfast table:

He seemed actually to draw his lips back and bare his teeth.

“Why, you’re the stuff that Hitlers and Huey Longs are made of,” he sneered.

“You’re a tyrant, that’s what you are – a petty tyrant. You want Alice to be your little proxy. ... You’re so dumb,” he raved on, positive venom in his tone, “that’s what you are – dumb.” ...

[She continues to Alice, in relation to Emanuel’s previous assertion, her own] wish to guide you, to keep you, to sustain you in any effort that requires courage, to comfort you in any defeat and to have you realize your best, your strongest and most useful self. This is what I conceive to be the duty and the joy of any parent.

The Haldeman-Julius that comes through in her letters to Alice is the Haldeman-Julius in which I ground my prior arguments about silence. *She is a woman of voice*, a woman (at least in her hometown, New York, and various other places across America) scorned, whose abusive husband worked for years to demolish and sweep aside. As she explains in a letter dated February 17, 1935,

I am a proud, sensitive, passionate woman who worships truth, loyalty, and justice. As such I was humiliated and outraged by your father in every fibre of my being so that I was driven almost frantic – until I reached the point of cleansing, self-respect giving revolt.

It is part of this revolt that I have tried to capture using Huckin's silence analytic. Haldeman-Julius's pain and marital strife was not unique, but as a woman writer for the world's largest publishing company, a writer who sold hundreds of thousands of books, her ability to reach a public audience was. And that propensity to push turning an audience into a public, through whatever coded guises and rhetorical techniques, was also a push to consolidate her own self-respect in relation to a husband *and* to a public. Even the frame of her silhouette of her rhetorical feminism is one of a woman in revolt. "Don't forget," she explains triumphantly to her daughter in that same letter, "I like to live [because this life] ... is all my own."

As Kohrs Campbell shows, the study of rhetorical women in history is so contoured and radical because, on occasion, in the specific folds of a rhetorical and life situation, paths are created by years of pressure, unique methods of revolt and interpretation are attempted (and, in our case, are recorded). Responses to this oppression, for Haldeman-Julius anyway, manifest in specific situations only available through particular means, in dialects of silence and passivity that convey their plight only to those with ears tuned to listen for those soft grace notes between phrases, those opposing modalities at work in the dominant tune of an age. This work represents one step, however, shaky, toward that kind of rhetorical listening to the performances of indirect feminist rhetoric that adhere to other, conventionalized structures of audience acquisition, functioning as a subtle, counterposed melodies might. Marcet Haldeman-Julius's performances of indirect feminist rhetoric, of her own covert and coded self-avowal, challenge us, as historians of rhetoric and writing, to pay attention to elements that work beneath face value, rhetorical elements employed by groups that lack overt access to public power.

Chapter 3

A Twilight of Idols: Feminist Ambivalence, Self-Care, and the Spectacular Exploitation of Male Weakness in the Work of Anita Loos

An ambiguity, in ordinary speech, means something very pronounced, and as a rule witty or deceitful[,] ... but it is descriptive because it suggests the analytical mode of approach, and with that I am concerned. – William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*

[H]ere, as it often happens, the jest betrays the seriousness of it. – Sigmund Freud, *Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious*

Anita never liked a fuss. – Gary Carey, *Anita Loos*

Anita Loos was, in addition to constructing and complicating American masculinity, a savvy mash-up artist of American modernity, combining a modern's refined literary sensibility with bawdy, lowbrow humor, one with the power to affect America's burgeoning audiences in the developing narratives of the early twentieth century, a time when, uniquely, "humor provid[ed] methods of concealment and disguise," where "humor and its frequent comrade, irony, also derive[d] power from its relation, from the conceptual and critical potential of unmasking" (Keyser 3). More than revolutionary rhetoric, she preferred subtly subversive gambits, moves meant to gain time, generate confusion, or create, hopefully, weaknesses in strategic opponents that would allow her to continue a trajectory that urged her toward the public sphere. And these gambits, always, played out through the language of gender and sexuality in the early 20th century. I read Anita Loos's work for its rhetorical subtlety, how it stands out from most recent discussions of rhetoric's role in an increasingly public culture, which have "acknowledged that if rhetoric is to serve the public good, it must involve the reciprocal exchange of views in a charitable context" (Couture and Kent 9). Loos's most strident critiques

not only avoid the reciprocal exchange of ideas, they fundamentally silence by cutting off her opponents' abilities at counter-proposition. And while the echoes of John Stuart Mill here maintain a pleasant timbre in liberal academe, the idea that positive and effective rhetoric takes place out in the open – in contexts that make possible, even encourage, reciprocity – denies the ever-present and insidious limitations of what James C. Scott calls the public transcript, the “on the record” material of history, shaped by elites and driven by the elision of counternarratives. This public transcript offers sharply limited geographies for subgroups or counterpublics whose language does not amend itself to flattery

Instead, certain types of radical critique (feminist critique in this instance) function more effectively in contexts that do not invite reciprocal exchange, in fact contexts that work to foreclose on the potential for reciprocal postulations from opposing positions. These types of radical indirect rhetoric are typically the stuff of meta-critique, questioning not just the transcript itself but its medium, its style, its authors, etc. In such cases – like the ones I review here – where women critique the limitations of male sexual power, of the entire matrix of patriarchic presumption, charitable contexts for public rhetoric are simply not available. In this way, feminisms, in finite moments in cultural history, manage to put to use the constraining performances of liberal individualism, of identity politics – and of the methods of propositional discourse that underlie them. In short, this chapter (and this dissertation, for that matter) is concerned with how a woman can *be* a feminist without *performing* one, how she can puncture and occupy the public transcript covertly through indirect-thought-rhetorical writing for the screen. Writers like Loos, according to Catherine Keyser, “accentuate the role of performance in everyday life and in print culture,” demonstrating a process that (Keyser draws from Walter

Benjamin here), “could expose the artificial form not only of the artwork but indeed of modern society” (3).

This chapter will (1) locate Loos in feminist discourse, (2) consider Loos as a Metis-figure, operating within and in-between traditional masculine power structures, (3) pay special attention to the mechanisms of hiding her feminist motives and effects, particularly her work titling early films for Douglas Fairbanks, (4) trace the development of her indirect feminist rhetoric out of screen genres and into the novel as she aims her critique and H.L. Mencken in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, and (5) lastly, the chapter will consider indirect feminist rhetoric in Loos’s autobiographical writings of the 1960s and 1970s, particularly her negotiation of her marriage to the abusive director John Emerson.

Studying Loos as a feminist represents a challenge to feminist historiography in two ways. First, she did not claim to be one – rather, she repeatedly and publicly declared that she *detested* feminists. This information is easily accessible in her rendering of suffragettes in D.W. Griffith’s *Intolerance* (1916) and in Loos’s autobiographies. Second, feminists (Loos knew them at the time as suffragettes) represented rhetorical technologies of propositionality that she did not respect – there was no art to it, no subtlety in placards and dour faces. Anita Loos wanted the power to critique *as well* as the power to fit in. This is what makes her a radical feminist, the throwing off of traditional definitions of how female power should be expressed and the assumption of quiet, mediatized (remember, film lacked the respect of Broadway in the middle to late teens), *entertaining* discourse. Loos’s radicalism both suffered and benefitted from (much like John Stewart’s escapades on the Daily Show) the constraints of entertainment-as-activism.

The indirect form, as vehicle for social critique, then, is as strikingly ironic as the positions in which modern public women like Loos were put, where “the guise of the flapper

enabled them to emerge from their homes and into the business world” as part of a patriarchic taxonomy rather than against it (Keyser 3). As Catherine Keyser argues, for Loos, literary fame meant slipping on the “smooth stockings of the chic feminine masquerade and pointing out where the runs were in the fabric” (78). But her gender-critique did not stop with feminine performance. In the following, I will elucidate how Loos was able to interrogate American masculinity and at the same time toss aside the standards and practices of American film up to 1916, American literature 1925, and American autobiography in the 1960s and 1970s. She, in her moment and her motive, was an important transitional figure in altering the discursive limits of gender-critique.

I attempt to add to the conversation of feminist rhetoric and power a historically specific analysis and provisional vocabulary of indirect rhetoric that represents and reflects access to the public sphere, to audiences, that at once delimit and capitalize on traditional limits of a female propositional ethos. Like Cheryl Glenn, I believe that any approach to a “regendered history” is never finalizable, never anything but partial, provisional, hopeful. “We all know,” after all, that despite the paucity of primary materials, “women’s rhetorical lives [and rhetorical forms of resistance] have always existed, among the innumerable, interminable, clear examples of public, political, agonistic, masculine discourse” (*Retold* 174).

Without a doubt, Loos had a life-long “affection for shady ladies, con men, and charlatans of both sexes” and doubted “politicians and do-gooders” and their sappy, straightforward modes of communication (Carey 3). Though throughout her career Loos always went for the laughs (tempting poet William Empson to write a poem about her entitled “A Girl Can’t Go on Laughing All the Time”),²⁰ Loos’s rhetorical personae often came with a dark side,

²⁰ In *William Empson: prophet against sacrifice*, Paul Fry argues that Loos’s ambiguous stance brought out Empson’s veiled feminist side: “He is also sensitive in some areas to what we would now call feminist themes ...

a side that would offer critique hedged in comedy, critique that, however radical it might be, stopped just short of overt social commentary. It's no great surprise that Empson was interested in Loos, as she almost certainly served as an inspiration for his 1930 book *Seven Different Types of Ambiguity*.²¹ As an entertainer obsessed with larceny, stealing laughs, Loos implicitly understood the power of indirection, of never seeming too serious, never being too earnest. Of course, that level of earnest propositionality would threaten Loos's comedic persona, but also, down deep, Loos's early experiences with her father made her "doubtful that the world would improve as it got older" (Carey 3). She was even more doubtful as to what would need to be done to make it better. What Loos had at her disposal was a mind for critique, irony, parody, satire. She was not working toward a better world for women, overtly at least. Instead, she was showing women the very limitations of male power, simmering male blindness (the unawareness of or lack of responsibility for sexual, social, and economic privilege) in its own juices, often to comedic ends.

A Modern Metis

Loos's mastery of indirection maintains, always, an importantly gendered element – it is this structure that winds itself helix-like around Loos's work and links her to a long and complex

There are feminist sympathies ... in his "Reflection from Anita Loos" (*Collected Poems*, p. 68: "Gentlemen prefer bound feet and wasp waist./A girl can't go on laughing all the time") (51). If anything, Empson's critique of Loos here displays the discrepancy between her personal power and her public performance of subordination.

²¹ Empson's reading of Freud is, in *Seven Kinds of Ambiguity*, very telling, and it presents the closest link the book offers to Loos's method: her propensity for dealing with oppositions in performative ways (he does this by linking opposition, *Wit*, and dreams). He explains, "Opposites, again, are an important element in the Freudian analysis of dreams; and it is evidence that the Freudian terminology, particularly the word 'condensation,' could be employed with profit for the understanding of poetry. Now a Freudian opposite at least marks dissatisfaction; the notion of what you want involves the idea that you have not got it, and this again involves the 'opposite defined by your context,' which is what you have and cannot avoid. In more serious cases, causing wider emotional reverberation, such as are likely to be reflected in language, in poetry, or in dreams, it marks a centre of conflict; the notion of what you want involves the notion that you must not take it, and this again involves the 'opposite defined by your context,' that you want something different in another part of your mind. Of course, conflict need not be expressed overtly as contradiction" (193).

trickster history. Michel de Certeau explains the historical character of this type of maneuver, in its ability to deliver

victories of the “weak” over the “strong” (whether the strength be that of powerful people or the violence of things or of an imposed order, etc.), clever tricks, knowing how to get away with things, “hunter’s cunning,” maneuvers, polymorphic simulations, joyful discoveries, poetic as well as warlike. The Greeks called these “ways of operating” *metis*. (xx)

De Certeau goes further, though, arguing that even before the Greeks named *metis*, this tendency manifested itself in natural phenomena. “They go much further back,” he argues, “to the immemorial intelligence displayed in the tricks and imitations of plants and fishes ... [T]here is a continuity and permanence to these tactics” (xx). One element that supplies continuity to what de Certeau calls “these tactics” is their continued association with bodies and embodiment. *Metis*, originally, is an embodied term. *Metis* is the first feminist – and her power is, from the start, indirect. Nonetheless, hers is real power – real enough to draw a violent response.

The figure of *metis* first appears in Hesiod’s *Theogony* in the 700s BCE as a troublesome spouse. She was Zeus’s first wife, and her mythological lineage was born of her power and consequent status as a threat to Zeus, though it was not that fact that caused him to trick and then to swallow her (she did provide him, abdominally, the ability to determine good from bad). In relaying this tale, “Hesiod is, of course, drawing on very old traditions of the mischief-making capacity of the trickster and culture-hero” (132). Norman O. Brown explains,

Metis is not the Wisdom that Stoic allegorists and most modern commentators take her to be. Metis is an ambivalent concept: ... she is a threat to Zeus and at the same time an indispensable aid to Zeus[. As] the mother of Zeus’s possible

successor[, her most] dangerous aspect is her Promethean side. ... Making the necessary allowances for the inevitable imprecision of mythological concepts, we may perhaps translate the abstraction Metis, in its dangerous aspect, as “creative ingenuity,” as a force making for cultural renewal. (133-134)

Renewal, for advanced cultures like Hesiod’s, often means technological recreation, reframing and recasting old stories from new perspectives, exactly Loos’s function. My reading of *metis* takes cues from Karen Kopelson’s excellent work on gender performance, rhetoric, and cunning (Kopelson 2003). Uniquely, in rhetoric and composition, Kopelson’s theorization of performing neutrality in the classroom underscores both the complexity of these acts and the need for more scholarship that takes performance seriously as a method for both offering information and garnering metacritical audience awareness.²²

Loos’s performances of neutrality have, thus far, never been studied rhetorically, and when they are viewed at all, scholars tend to focus on very isolated segments of Loos’s writing career, virtually ignoring her ability to adapt her work to several different media: as Brooks Hefner argues,

she was the only major figure of this era to make the transition from writing for successful films to writing successful fiction; she even moved back into film

²² Kopelson’s take on cunning in the rhetoric and composition classroom is that it is best used as a performative tool to deal with “student resistance” to whom we teachers appear to be, resistance to what they perceive are our ideological concerns (116). “Resistance,” she tells us, “is all the rage” (117). Resistance in the classroom, for Kopelson carries with it “exigencies that call for” the simulation of our identities, the production of neutrality, particularly important for those in “marginalized constituencies,” people of color, gays and lesbians, etc. Kopelson continues, citing Celeste Condit, who “has written of her experiences teaching at a Southern university that merely to walk into a classroom ‘in pants and short hair’ is to be ‘branded ... a liberal, a feminist, a dyke’ and as such, rejected” (119). This kind of resistance can, with contextual variations, be extrapolated into any number of situations where information and attention is being translated back and forth between speakers/addressees, parents/children, writers/audiences. It is this notion of the benefits of “playing it straight,” of putting on a mask of neutrality, of performing normalcy so as to avoid threatening audience members’ potential reception of one’s work that got me started thinking about Anita Loos’s indirection. I contend that Loos’s trick is similar to the one Kopelson espouses – portraying a go-with-the-flow comedienne while harboring some potentially radical viewpoints on gender relations and power at a time when traditional American gender/power relations were highly conventionalized and predictable.

after the nature of screenwriting had been altered by the coming of sound as well writing numerous Broadway plays and, when the 1960s-70s silent film-nostalgia hit, several retrospective autobiographies. (108)

Anita Loos shaped herself as seemingly a bit player in the public transcript, a humorist, interested in fun over art and certainly over social critique. The Loos of these pages stands in sharp distinction to the Loos traditionally rendered by scholars as a comic presence and/or closet modernist, as this Loos demonstrates moments of a performative, rhetorical feminism that was at once subtly rendered and ahead of its time.²³ *Approaching Loos this way demands a revisionist, third-wave historiography, one that foregrounds motive and challenges traditional feminist ontologies of the late teens and twenties, focusing on the act of rhetorical subversion as a feminist endeavor over and beyond the more propositional feminisms of the suffrage movement.* Loos did not demand rights for women; rather, she offered artful, witty critique wrapped in parody and delivered to massive popular audiences. Like her idol Voltaire, Loos wrote in order to act.²⁴ Almost exclusively, work on Loos has focused on her most successful endeavor, a novella – *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1925). Published by Boni and Liveright alongside Hemingway’s *In Our Time*, Dreiser’s *An American Tragedy*, O’Neill’s *Desire Under the Elms*, Sherwood Anderson’s *Dark Laughter* and several other modern classics, it was not only a best-seller in its day but also, as Hefner explains, “lived more lives than had perhaps any other text in

²³Reading Loos’s work as indirect feminist rhetoric challenges traditional feminist historiography of the teens and twenties that tends to filter socially progressive women into two general categories: the flapper and the suffragette. Female outliers (like Loos) indicate that this traditional historiographical vision lacks subtlety and indicates a need for an emphasis on the rhetorical elements of this work: motive, exigence, and technique.

²⁴ Voltaire’s work had a huge impact on Loos’s development, and readers may hear echoes of Cunegonde’s structured butchery in Loos’s treatment of Fairbanks, H.L. Mencken, and eventually her husband John Emerson. Though unlike Cunegonde, Loos’s butchery is metaphorical and structural, working to cut from the men the invisible sex power they seem to take so boldly for granted.

American popular culture. Of twentieth-century texts, only L. Frank Baum's *The Wizard of Oz* (1900) could claim presence in as many forms of media to that point" (107).²⁵

Loos, like Voltaire, specialized in indirection and maintained consistently in her writing a dual desire, one erotic and one critical: she wished to bring pleasure to her audiences, laughter, but she did so by slowly eviscerating presumptions about male intellectual, physical, and sexual supremacy. While her attempts at laughter are direct, her attempts at critique under that eros are quite the opposite. By way of establishing a working definition of indirection, anthropologists Joy Hendry and C.W. Watson explain it as "the communication of thoughts not directly, straightforwardly, or unambiguously, but in a manner which to some degree or another deliberately obscures, hides or 'wraps' the message" (2).²⁶ This type of "obscuring ... can and often does occur in texts and in narrative discourse through, for example, metaphor, symbolism, allusion and of course irony ... [as well as] actions and performances, the use of conventional symbols" (2). This indirection, always, for Loos, anyway, evidences not only her own critical orientations but also the "profound situational ironies and cultural contradictions" women like Loos found themselves in (Keyser 3). In the case of Anita Loos's writing for silent cinema in 1916 and popular magazines in the twenties, as well as autobiographies in the sixties and seventies, indirect feminist rhetoric consists of moments where Loos's radical feminist critique gets coded in order to allow its author to "give offence with relative impunity," to "entertain through the manipulation of disguise," and to "exclude from discourse those not familiar with the conventions of its usage and thereby strengthen the solidarity of those who are" (2); in short: indirect feminist rhetorical critique allowed Loos to insert a stringent critique of blind and/or

²⁵ It was *Blondes'* success that sounded the death-knell for Loos's already embattled marriage to John Emerson, who struggled greatly with his wife's success.

²⁶ This notion of "wrapping" a message is the closest definition available to Loos's technique. She does obscure the message but only insofar as it is wrapped in generic, contextual, and linguistic moves that hedge on audience expectation.

domineering masculinity – in the form of her star Douglas Fairbanks, her idol H.L. Mencken, and her husband, John Emerson – made possible the activation of certain audiences, subgroups, counterpublics, within the mass audiences her writings reached.²⁷ Certainly, along with other “smart writers” of her generation (some others included Edna St. Vincent Millay, Dorothy Parker, Lois Long, Jessie Fauset, Nella Larsen, Dawn Powell, and Mary McCarthy), Loos sought access to the factions of the reading public who looked for coded critique; she also constructed texts that would, intentionally or not, call out to radically emergent future audiences. These were funny women, and as Keyser explains, their humor was double-edged: it “can appear ingratiating even as it interrogates” (2).²⁸

As Freud explains of wit’s wide potential: its “object of attack” may “equally be institutions, persons, in so far as they may act as agents of these” or even “philosophies of life which enjoy so much respect that they can be challenged in no other way than under the guise of a witticism” (160); it is, as it were, a historically specific, gendered, avenue of critique that not only reached popular audiences with force and humor, but through a coy cynicism, it also reveals the fragile structures at play under the knife’s edge of social privilege.

From her numerous magazine interviews in the teens and twenties, her interest in fashion, and her witty banter, it doesn’t take much effort to understand Loos as a modern woman, one who dressed like a flapper, who presented the face of someone much more interested in society than, say, sociology. Though I argue that one thing Loos does is to make herself, or her critical stance as a writer anyway, invisible, she was very much seen – wealthy, liberated-but-not-

²⁷ See Michael Warner’s *Public and Counterpublics* (2005) for an in-depth discussion of this strategy.

²⁸ Kenneth Burke’s assertion in *Permanence and Change* that style is ingratiation underlies this analysis.

political as a modern woman.²⁹ Recent work by Liz Conor on women and modernity has focused on the modern woman as an entity of appearance. Despite her media-friendliness and courtship of the spotlight (Loos much preferred a spread in *Vanity Fair* or a write-up on Page Six than a placard), Loos was first a writer – more notable for manipulating the public’s gaze than being subject to it. Liz Conor argues that the modern woman’s subjectivity was constructed by her very awareness of being seen, her ability “to appear,” a theme about which Loos was ambivalent, often noting the importance of appearance and its captivating potential. Throughout her life, Loos maintained a weight of just under 100 pounds, clothes by the best designers (often Mainbacher), and a penchant for controlling her appearance. In a May 11, 1965 letter to photographer Alix Jeffry, she writes, “Thanks for sending the blow-ups of the pictures, but now that I see them full size, I realize that I have reached the age when I should never have any more pictures taken.” Loos continues, “In fact, I was so appalled by my appearance, that I hardly slept all night, and have now decided to spend the remainder of my life keeping out of the public eye. Thanks just the same,” she extends, “for your valiant efforts.” Loos knew as well as any modern woman of the immense pressure “to appear,” and sought throughout her career to put it to use. Her indirect feminist rhetoric, though, at least in all but her autobiographical writing, focused less on herself and more on manipulating the appearances of others.

Loos’s penchant for being seen – and controlling how people saw her – began early. Before she was a writer for silent Hollywood, Loos was a stage performer, often even as a young girl, to bring in income for her family. Appearing as little Lord Fauntleroy and playing in (what she claimed was) the first American performance of *A Doll’s House*. Performance was also a

²⁹ This artificial public persona caused film historian Cari Beauchamp to explain, “[t]he more I learned about her personal life, the more frustrated I became with her for presenting to the world this picture of a passive fun lover just along for the ride” (5).

way for her to capture the attention of her rambunctious father, R. Beers Loos. Cari Beauchamp explains,

She idolized her father and adored tagging along with him and his plethora of friends to the saloons of the Barbary Coast, where lunch was free when you bought beer for a nickel. R. Beers Loos put his daughters on the stage at an early age to help pay the rent, and Anita's being the center of attention obviously pleased her father. Anita translated the applause she received into assurance that she was special and different from other children. At a very early age she found her forte – she had a talent to amuse. ... She continued to worship her father in spite of or because of the fact that he was a scalawag, and all her life she would find herself attracted to scoundrels. She longed to grow up to be just like her father. (*Rediscovered* 9, 10)

R. Beers Loos was an extremely self-indulgent man, his very insolence leaving a kind of halo around him in the eyes of his young daughter (Carey 16-20). Soon, though, her father's paper, *The Dramatic Event*,

went under because of poor supervision, and R. Beers took to managing stock companies and, as a last resort, a carnival. He didn't bring home much money, and often Anita was the family's main means of support. Out of necessity, she continued to act in a touring company playing one-night stands throughout northern California. Each time she returned home, home was a different apartment, each grubbier than the last. (Carey 16)

Nonetheless, Anita kept acting until her graduation from high school freed her up for other things, particularly writing. She said of herself, "I was always standing on the sidelines, making

impudent comments. . . . I was destined to be an outsider, too much the observer to ever be deeply involved in anything but my work” (Carey 20). This early Anita, whose deep connection with her larcenous father and his own outsider ways works toward our current understanding of Loos the rhetor – eliciting audience awareness, again from offstage, eliding her motives the whole time.

Admittedly, writing this kind of rhetorical history is, as Janet Steiger explains, “contingent, subjective, evaluative, and judgmental” not to mention driven by a third-wave performance feminist impulse to read female rhetorical subjects through the very lens of performance rather than assumed ontological reality (xiii). Steiger’s method of rhetorical listening is similar to Glenn’s call to listen for the “production of silence *as a rhetoric*,” as Loos’s purposive elision draws attention away from her and away from the critique she’s making, as though her critique functions in a kind of rhetorically silent space (*Silence* xi). Loos’s rhetorical indirection is, like Glenn explains of many women, part of a silent past of “gestures, conversations, and original manuscripts,” as well as motives, intentions, and an indirect rhetor’s visions of the promise of their critique (*Silence* 1). Silence, or in my case, spaces of rhetorical elision or misdirection may very well be, as Glenn writes, “the most undervalued and *under*-studied traditionally feminine site and concomitant rhetorical art” (2). And Loos’s silences weren’t full silences in the sense of, for instance, Spivak’s subaltern woman – Loos’s silences were purposive.

Loos works both through performative silences and performative language, and a perennial complication in studying her type of rhetorical indirection comes in the abrupt interpretive leap the researcher must take to venture beyond the realm of propositional truth and into the world of performative indirection, rhetoric that “make so obvious the performative

nature of both gender and sexual identity that it may be read as highlighting the performative nature of being in general” (Brummett 26). But performative rhetoric can be explicit or implicit, and the two differ significantly. In *How to Do Things with Words*, J.L. Austin explains the difference. The former “begin with or include some highly significant and unambiguous expressions such as ‘I bet’, ‘I promise’, ‘I bequeath’ – an expression very commonly also used in naming the act” (32), while implicit performative utterances hide their very performative gesture whereby “there may be nothing in the circumstances by which we can decide whether or not the utterance is performative at all,” when read as simple analytic statement (33). This type of implicit performative has often been relegated to the trash bin of misunderstandings and incomplete locutions, but implicit performatives also create a space for radical (because unanticipated) critique, a kind of space where consciousness-raising as a feminist method is portentous. Unlike propositionally oriented rhetorical approaches, it does not ask its audience for a response, for the explicit performative: “I am feminist; I swear.” This use of implicit consciousness-raising is a character of indirect feminist rhetoric insofar as it does “not ‘describe’ or ‘report’” anything; it is not, indeed cannot be “‘true or false’ [and the] uttering of the sentence is, or is part of, the doing of an action” (Austin 5).

My work also employs performative language to articulate and demonstrate those moments in the history of feminist rhetoric where radical feminist critique lived and even prospered under the auspices of some other, diverting, external medium (in this case, film). The call to this level of messy complexity is one that feminist researchers encourage, emphasizing the role of the scholar in the fuzzy acts of reconstitution of a rhetorical situation. Glenn argues,

Those of us employing feminism in the history of rhetoric share the same deep sense of common purpose: we are working with various openings that provide

opportunities to recover, claim, and articulate women's and men's contributions to and participation in the ever-expanding histories of rhetoric. ... [W]ith each of our rewritings, we are reseeding and unsettling rhetorical histories – at the same time that we (re)compose and reconstitute our scholarly focus, or professions, our selves. (*Retold* 174)

In the case of Loos's writing for Fairbanks, her rhetorical life was not lost by its elision from the public sphere but by its very integration into the public sphere, which, in 1916 anyway, assumed a kind of gendered rhetorical propriety: if it was public, it had to be propositional. Even Dorothy Parker's quasi-feminist jokes often took the form of propositions, even her poetry in *Enough Rope* (1926), published the year after *Blondes* by Boni and Liveright. Anita Loos's counter-propositional feminist rhetoric doubtlessly reached film audiences in the teens and twenties, but in most cases, it was lost in the laughs. Loos wanted it that way.

Indirect feminist rhetoric is problematic from a historian's point of view because its technologies work against traditional notions of rhetoric and feminism – both of which have historically functioned out in the open, with the reciprocal trading of propositions. Feminist indirect rhetoric, in almost every case, avoids this and aims to raise the consciousness of an audience, to sensitize its members without evoking reflexive awareness of the persuasive or identificational process, that is, without evoking a counter-proposition. In the best cases, indirect consciousness-raising results in the audience members' sense that the new awareness was self-generated. It is a *techne* all its own – its presence in the feminist rhetorical canon just barely beginning to be fleshed out. Among its numbers are those feminists who eschew claims to identity categories and political agendas (such as “feminist”); they are feminists embedded in other lines of work, feminists who seek other types of audiences than those prepared for

politicization. They are the feminists whose work under and around the public transcript resisted historicization until the lens of third-wave performance feminism allowed scholars to silhouette their movements and techniques by downplaying identity and emphasizing motive and performance in written rhetoric.

Titling Films and Creating the Fairbanks-Man

In her earliest work for silent film – as a writer for D.W. Griffith, Loos emerged as an important force in early Hollywood behind the rather conventional “woman’s film” (films featuring female protagonists and related to women’s experience that were not feminist films – succumbing to traditional/conventional definitions of male/female relationships). Her work in these films had few of the radical rhetorical elements that would emerge in Loos’s writing for Douglas Fairbanks in 1916’s *His Picture in the Papers*. But, importantly, Loos’s radicalism was secreted, not injected into the public sphere, making her methods as importantly radical as her messages in certain, contextually bound instances. As Loos, an avid reader of philosophy, knew from Kantian deontology, subversion had to be an extraordinary maneuver, not a regular one – just as lying is presumption that most of us tell the truth.

What follows traces Loos’s particular use of rhetorical indirection in *Papers* and its embedding in the cinematic spectacle, a location that creates a particularly thick generic frame (Frow 2005) in and through which indirect feminist critique can function unassumingly and effectively. In addition, this chapter historicizes a moment in the development of Loos’s indirect art, demonstrating the Fairbanks period as a transitional moment between her more conventional work in the woman’s films and her most famous and most radical piece, 1925’s *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (as well as her transition from filmic to literary spectacular contexts). Loos’s indirect rhetoric parodies Fairbanks’s masculine power (and his representative status as an icon

of American masculinity) and co-opts parts of the star's audience that are sensitized to gender critique without disturbing the more conventional audience expectations.

Particularly important to this study is Loos's work for Douglas Fairbanks, a period in the middle teens in which Loos created (or helped create) the Fairbanks-man, a physically agile but mentally unaware man-child, whose very lack of the capacity for irony made him the perfect canvas for Loos's critique of male blindness in what Beauchamp calls "the sizzle ... in witty title cards" (*Rediscovered* 41). In a way – for a limited moment in 1916 – Loos's writing for Fairbanks, one of the world's biggest stars in the teens, makes her a kind of fitful rhetorical architect of American masculinity, one who, as it turns out, had a keen eye for gendered social critique. Loos often joked publicly (though slyly) about her work for Fairbanks, saying that her "stories for Fairbanks were hardly written at all – rather she simply had to come up with things for the actor to jump over or leap from because his acting was less important than his athletic ability" (Beauchamp *Rediscovered* 41).³⁰

Loos's work with Fairbanks, especially in her earliest work for him (*His Picture in the Papers*) demonstrated her radical approach. She had nothing to lose. She was a reliable and well-paid contracted writer for Triangle, working under Griffith, and he was preoccupied with *Intolerance* (1916). Loos's first endeavor with Fairbanks was a spoof – on the actor (who was soon to be let go, as he had failed to impress Griffith), on the medium, on the notion of American masculinity. That Fairbanks was able to massage Loos's product into a career is a testament to

³⁰ Fairbanks, reflecting on his work in the teens in a 1922 article for the *Ladies Home Journal*, disagrees, with a caveat. Perhaps, he commits, "I lost sight of the purpose of these stunts and may have overdone the effect" (Fairbanks 13). He continues, weaving his own alibi: "Never were these things intended for an exhibition of physical process or as feats attractive in themselves. Just as a smile reflects good nature from within, these things reflect the indomitable spirit of youth" (13). That Fairbanks was 39 when he made this claim demonstrates his own proclivity to align himself and to an extent hide behind the burgeoning culture of youthful masculinity that so fervently supported his career. Gaylyn Studlar explains, for instance, that in a 1917 interview, James Smith described "Doug" as "athletically rugged and distinctly masculine. When he talks you get the impression of a boy who hasn't grown up" (Studlar 21). While Loos's Fairbanks-man was a witless boob, Fairbanks's own self-concept was distinctly different, particularly as his career changed trajectory in the 1920s.

his own spectacular nature.³¹ The studio wanted Fairbanks to succeed, but since he worked for Griffith and not Mack Sennett (also at Triangle), his athletic talents went largely unnoticed. Loos worshipped Griffith, who gave her her start, and, to catch his eye, intended to make great fun of him while showcasing her own skills, even if that meant significantly changing the medium. As Laura Frost argues in “Blondes Have More Fun: Anita Loos and the Language of Silent Cinema,”

Film historians have presented the main story of early cinema as the controversy about the coming of sound, but there was also a passionate debate about titling, and Loos was an important part of this. Challenging the separation of literature and cinema as high and low culture, Loos develops a mode of writing in which literature and cinema together unmoor the conventional relationship of the image to the word. (293)

Frost understands Loos’s titling style as a radical shift in the production of titles; she calls it the cross-pollination of the literary and the cinematic. Frost’s assertion is undoubtedly true, but Loos’s contributions go far beyond mixing and matching modernist high culture with lowbrow humor; Loos’s wordy titles in *Papers* evoked a powerful-though-subtle critique of male sex-power, a critique in the form of indirect feminist rhetoric that at once elided Loos’s critical motives and co-opted Fairbanks’s audience. Though Loos has been much heralded of late for her work in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (Frost 2010, Hefner 2010, Keyser 2010, Barrett-Fox

³¹ Fairbanks remembers his beginnings very differently in his 1922 article “Let Me Say This for the Films” in the *Ladies Home Journal*. In this case, as in others, Fairbanks elides his early work with Loos altogether. He explains, “the night I saw *The Birth of a Nation* I knew that I wanted to be in the pictures. I had much the same sort of vibration or thrill that I had when I saw the Grand Cañon, nor that it impressed me so mightily, but both left me wordless. Accordingly, when D.W. Griffith offered me a ten weeks’ contract I was quite willing to leave the stage for a while” (13). Fairbanks not only fails to mention the importance of Loos’s ironic titles, but he also fails to mention the fact that Griffith planned on firing the actor.

2012), very little time or attention has been focused on analysis of her earliest films. Hefner explains,

For Loos and her “school,” subtitles become modernist spaces where text can intentionally create conflicts of meaning with the images they accompany, and the artistry they represent is a function of the subversive power of language. These spaces isolate language as an object of aesthetic interest, straining its purely mimetic function while acknowledging its inability to capture every aspect of human experience. ... [T]hese titles undercut any sense of wholeness or completeness, highlighting the jagged edges of the narrative. (110)

Her self-effacing rhetorical technique and effusive manner, characteristics that allowed Loos to be a master-critic at the same time she wrote films that audiences loved, have lain rather dormant in the critical literature. Hefner’s assertion that Loos’s techniques of indirection were modernist misses almost completely her vast set of literary and philosophical influences (whom she read and reread), from Voltaire to Schopenhauer, who had tackled the topic of indirect critique centuries before. In his *Art of Controversy*, Schopenhauer argues,

The simple Philistine believes that life is something infinite and unconditioned, and tries to look upon it and live it as though it left nothing to be desired. By method and principle the learned Philistine does the same: he believes that his methods and his principles are unconditionally perfect and objectively valid; so that as soon as he has found them, he has nothing to do but to apply them to circumstances, and then approve or condemn. But happiness and truth are not to be seized in this fashion. It is phantoms of them along that are sent to us here, to stir us into motion. (76)

Schopenhauer, often viewed as an arch-pessimist, was an author to whom Loos returned often. His critique appealed to Loos, both philosophically and stylistically. In his chapter in *Controversy* on aphorisms, he goes on to elaborate a theme Loos takes up again and again.

What makes us almost inevitably ridiculous is our serious way of treating the passing moment, as though it necessarily had all the importance which it seems to have. It is only a few great minds that are above this weakness, and, instead of being laughed at, have come to laugh themselves. (78)

In *Folk Women and Indirection in Morrison, Ni Dhuibhne, Huston, and Savin*, Jacqueline Fulmer makes much the same point, though in a more contemporary way and a slightly different context. She explains,

The operation of humor in folk speech, in rhetorical figures, depends on reader recognition as much as strategies of indirection do. Whether readers figure out the allusion tied to an indirect point, or whether they comprehend the punch line of a joke, laughter may come in either case from the pleasure and shock of recognition. Sometimes the punch line and the indirect point become one and the same. (31)

Even scholars as astute as Hefner have miscategorized Loos's motive in her pursuit of changing the nature of film titles, her desire for exactly the convergence of the methods of indirection and the punch line itself. In addition to the genre-coding titles provided her, Loos, "the rhetor[,] at no time directly contradicts the hegemonic assumption under scrutiny [in this case, that Fairbanks is a great-American man], hence the strategy is indirect" (Fulmer 28). In 1916, titles were simply not respectable literary writing, thus could never carry in them the sophisticated

methods and critique that Loos offered. Initially, even the most sophisticated critics missed their radical potential.

As early as 1916, Münsterberg wrote, in what was the first and only theorization of silent films of that period, that “intertitles should be regarded as ‘extraneous to the original character of the photoplay;’ they are ‘accessory, while the primary power must lie in the content of the pictures themselves’” (Frost 295). Münsterberg, who had been brought to Harvard in the early 1890s to lead the psychological laboratory William James was then setting up in the style of Wundt (Münsterberg’s mentor), downplays the importance of titles but accurately assesses the function of cinematic spectacle to activate audiences; he notices that cinematic spectacle is a process of stimulating audience imagination as a response to what is seen (and I would argue what is read, as well) on the screen. According to Richard Griffith’s introduction to Münsterberg’s work, “[t]he model of the film experience which it shows us stresses imaginative participation far above visual perception. The whole is greater than and different from the sum of its parts because we make it so” (xiii). Though he never uses this language, Münsterberg’s emphasis on the activation of audience demonstrates *the rhetorical elements of the filmic spectacle*, its dialogical interplay with audience members’ consciousnesses, levels of awareness, and potential future action.

In Anita Loos’s early work for Douglas Fairbanks, for instance, work that overlaps Münsterberg’s book, her methods of indirect rhetorical critique are noteworthy for not only her deft touch at pleasing audiences with humor but also for a hard-to-detect undercurrent of social critique, ranging from class-based satire to more cutting appropriations of American masculinity.

Speaking of her earliest scenarios, Loos writes

The plots I wrote in the beginning were pretty contrived, but as my experience with life broadened I began to dredge real situations and real people from it. Inspired by memories of my Detroit beau, I wrote a picture for Douglas Fairbanks called *American Aristocracy*, which was a satire on the big names of United States industry such as the Fords, the Heinzes, so important to the world of pickles, and the Chalmerses, who were touchingly proud of the underwear they manufactured. Eventually every experience became grist to my movie mill; I dished up Pop's cronies and my brother's increasingly important friends, and even began to make fun of the rich who had so overawed me on first acquaintance.

(*Girl* 74)

Rhetorical indirection was, for Loos, a targeted strategy, and not all her work enlisted its techniques. In order to discern it, to sense its presence, one must pay attention to history, technologies of spectacle, and, perhaps most important, the author's motive. Once those three elements are brought together, Anita Loos's techniques of indirection-via-cinematic spectacle begin to take shape. Rhetoric itself, as Amy Koerber reminds us, is a "technology" (25), a tool that helps its users (speakers and writers) accomplish the task of constructing meaning," invoking audiences, and raising consciousness (59). She continues,

feminist scholars should ask questions that attempt to account for the complex relationships that exist between technology and conceptions of gender in society. Such questions should attempt to determine what we can learn about the political effects and consequences of technology. (Koerber 66)

What follows is an attempt to reconstruct, provisionally, feminist rhetorical machinery in the medium of American cinema at the very dawn of the Hollywood star system, a time when

celebrity was emergent and malleable, a time when American culture “was being transformed” and conditioned by “standardization, mass production, and by the very thrust of cultural uniformity” (Sklar 2). Fairbanks was the prototypical action star, cold-blooded, unsympathetic, one that Vachel Lindsay describes in his 1915 book *The Art of the Moving Picture*, as “a variety of amiable or violent ghost” (42).

These evolving cinematic technologies are crucial to Loos’s creation and use of cinematic spectacle, a construction she alludes to in her 1919 short story “The Moving Pictures of Blinkville,” a commentary on the magical effects of cinema on audiences in those early days.³² In “Blinkville,” Curley, an unemployed young man who had been sleeping in a small town’s picture palace for want of a room of his own decides to do the theater’s owner a favor by way of creating community interest in films and filling the theater’s seats. Curley explains, “We’re going to do some special advertizin’ for this here joint that will put that other honkey tonk outa business” (Loos, *Rediscovered* 107). His plan, based upon the average person’s lack of knowledge in the filmmaking process, involves taking the theater’s projector outside one day and pretending that he is filming something on the town’s streets. “I’ll stand there an’ turn the little old crank, [and] all the boobs [will] think we’re takin’ moving pictures and the house’ll be jammed, just from the talk that’ll get around” (107). Summing up his audience, Curley announces to his makeshift partner in crime, Frank, that “compared to the rube in this town an idiot would be a college professor, so we’re perfectly safe. You haul ’er down” (107).

³² For Loos, cinema had a particularly powerful spectacular effect: the effect to confuse and ultimately reverse traditional power structures, structures that existed both on screen and between the writer, the actors, and the audience. These manipulations of spectacle take years to perfect, according to a 1918 article by Loos and Emerson in the June edition of *Photoplay Magazine*. She explains: “It is always hard for the outsider in any art to realize the importance of technical knowledge and the necessity of form. Now art is of necessity a thing of form. Form is its first essential. There is a skeleton under every great work of art; a skeleton of perfect proportions” (78). Most importantly, though, for Loos, “the height of art is to so cover it that it is not apparent to the casual observer” (78).

Loos's meditation on the power of cinematic spectacle comes in the form of the ease of access one has to audiences through even the implication of film. She continues,

Curley ducked under his black flannel and grabbed the crank. By this time about ten people had stopped to watch the proceedings. As the little girls came into the bogus camera's imaginary focus, Curley slowly turned the crank. The girls stopped, made as if to turn back, giggled and finally walked kittenishly past the "camera." ... The crowd grew and became more and more mysterious and formidable. Finally a policeman attracted by the mob showed up in the distance. (108-109)

Having wooed the crowd, Curley begins to field requests that he show the film he's just "shot" on the town's streets, and still hoping to fill the theater's seats as a gesture to the owner, he agrees, though he hasn't recorded a single frame with the projector. The first step in cinematic spectacle comes in the magnetism the new medium emits, its very ability to gather a crowd, to create expectation, to consolidate audiences.³³

After the matinee, he and Frank went over the film of a parade of the Hudson-Fulton celebration which was booked for the next week. The picture was almost hopelessly metropolitan, but by long and labored work at scratching and clouding the film the effect was produced that the most keen eyed observer would fail to understand. The scene projected on the curtain was not a picture – it was a series of blurs and blotches, with here and there a human form indicated amid the surging storm of scratches. Williams, on the theory that he might as well be dead

³³ I imagine this could be said about any new technologies. One thinks of the iPad. So the very newness and mystery of a technology creates the first layer of spectacle.

as the way he was, finally decided to ... run the film as "Scenes from Blinkville."

(110)

Curley shows the film, which is notably impossible to make out, to an audience that is inexplicably in the throes of cinematic bliss. Williams, the theater's owner and the target of Curley's misguided philanthropic gesture, was terrified. "When the fateful film at last arrived on the program he was too unnerved even to glance in the door at what was sure to be his ruin," so he tried to slip out the back door, where a mysterious stranger stopped him:

"Say," said the stranger, "do you own this house?"

"Yes," Williams managed to gasp weakly.

"Well," said the stranger, "I've been looking the place over for a couple of days and seeing your packed houses. How much would you sell for?"

"What?"

"I'll give you four thousand for it just as it stands." (111)

Called back into the theater to make a speech to the ebullient crowd, Williams is taken aside by the town's mayor.

"Mr. Williams," he said. "I – in fact we all – want to thank you. Your photographic efforts – ahem – were perhaps a little clouded and indistinct, but it give you – ah – all the more honor for undertaking the – er – enterprise of having the pictures made under the great difficulties of light and development which your esteemed photographer has just explained to me." He nodded to Curley and Curley nodded back with a smile.

Williams bowed idiotically.

“And,” the mayor lowered his voice, “I have just made arrangements to purchase the film for \$500 after you are through with it. I shall send it back for exhibition in my hometown in Ohio.” (111)

Loos’s meditation in “Blinkville” is less on the Curley’s cleverness or the vapidness of the town’s audience. Rather, it is a meditation on the content-neutral force with which this newly emergent spectacular technology could fascinate, obscure, and ultimately enact substantive reversals of power. That this story is written in 1919, two years after the star sent her packing, implies a kind of dig at Fairbanks’ spectacular status, stature, and popularity.

During Fairbanks’s heyday, America found itself at the apex of a crisis of masculinity, as the country transitioned to an urban nation and the nature of men’s work changed radically, from field-work to white or blue collar labor. Men and women, for the first time, held the same jobs, and men were in need of a star that could salvage their collective masculine identity. As Gaylyn Studlar explains, “In concert with the obvious kinetic appeal of Fairbanks’s films, the star’s popularity was crucially dependent upon his textual alignment with this culturally pervasive discourse focused on reform and the future of American masculinity” (24). Studlar continues that “Fairbanks films of the 1910s almost all had at their core an imminently recognizable and important lesson to contemporary audiences: a lesson in the attainment of manhood in modern American society,” *Papers* is an important exception (25). If Loos was indeed providing “lessons” about masculinity, Loos scripted them carefully, paying particular attention to her own effacement, allowing her own “subordination ... a credible performance of humility and deference” and constructing for Fairbanks “a credible performance of haughtiness and mastery” (Scott 10). Before Loos was scripting the banal attainment of manhood, though, she was critiquing it. Further, though she would tailor her brand of gender-parody to fit Fairbanks’s

rising star and Rooseveltian image as his popularity (and her paychecks) increased, this first film's rhetorical situation offered her different critical potential; Fairbanks' contract was about to expire, and Loos knew that Griffith detested the actor's lack of talent, so she could monkey with him. In addition, America was changing. The 1920 census would show it, for the first time, as an urban nation, a momentous transition from agrarian pre-Civil War days (Studlar 13).

In the earliest days of American cinematic production, the medium lacked the cultural cache of Broadway, or even of dog shows and horse racing (Studlar 10). In the early teens, Harry Aitken of the newly merged Triangle Company, began following the lead of Adolph Zukor by bringing Broadway talent to Hollywood in order to garner attention and respect. One of the people Aitken brought in was a mildly famous Broadway comedian named Douglas Fairbanks. While Fairbanks had enjoyed moderate success in New York, the need to increase cinema's public stature and pedigree was such that Aitken brought the not-so-young New Yorker out to California for \$2000 a week, a hefty paycheck for an actor that Aitken and his collaborator, David Wark Griffith, would soon find out had some interesting limitations. Griffith, to whom Fairbanks was assigned, did not like Fairbanks's style, having famously told director John Emerson, another Broadway transplant, "Don't waste your time on him, Emerson, because he can't act" (Schickel 42).

With Griffith busy on his epic *Intolerance* (1916), his answer to public criticism garnered from the palpable racism of *Birth of a Nation* (1915), Emerson undertook making a picture with Fairbanks, whose option at Triangle was about to expire – his face was failing. Fairbanks had to defy the close-up, a shot pioneered by Griffith; *he had to move*. Emerson set his sights on a scenario called *His Picture in the Papers* by Anita Loos, a staff writer who happened to be a tiny, witty, radiant brunette, fourteen years his junior. Emerson encouraged Loos, who was always

game for a challenge, to write a new style of intertitles, filling in plot and jokes where the wispy-thought-kinetically-functional character Fairbanks assembled, fails to. Loos, immediately smitten by Emerson's aloofness and reputation for womanizing (and aware that Griffith, so busy proving to the world that he was not a racist, would not pay any attention to their little experiment), undertook a joke-turned-revolution: she wrote the story – prolix, witty, ironic, everything the Fairbanks-man was not. She wrote around him. The product boiled with potential.

When the film was finished, Loos had impressed Emerson, for whom by this point she had developed a strange kind of longing, only exacerbated by his New York attitude and Broadway pedigree.

The film did not impress Griffith. Griffith trashed the project, alluding to the fact that people did not come to the movies to read – he saw no future for Fairbanks or for the wordy titles that Loos had written and remained wary that most of Loos's humor lay trapped in the text, unable to be translated into moving images. According to Hollywood lore, after Griffith shelves the film, it accidentally gets sent to New York anyway and winds up a handy substitute for another film lost in transport. In her autobiography, *Kiss Hollywood Good-bye*, Loos recalls,

It wasn't easy to get D.W.'s okay to film my story, but he finally agreed and at the same time warned Emerson to finish the picture before Doug's option came due, because the studio was going to let him go. Following Emerson's instructions, I wrote my plot in full detail, and included a lot of subtitles. ...Not until our movie was cut and titled were we able to snare Griffith into a projection room to see what we'd done. D.W. viewed those subtitles with grudging attention, and at the end, he made one shattering comment. "Your idea doesn't work, Mr. Emerson. We'll have to shelve the picture. (6-7)

Loos continues, carefully rendering herself the storyteller, the seer and not the object seen, characteristically keeping herself out of the picture, recalling the “accidental” New York premiere.

His Picture in the Papers started to unroll, beginning with a long subtitle, which was a highly unusual procedure. Movie titles up to that time had been strictly informative and very brief: “The Next Day,” “That Same Evening,” or at their most literate, “Came the Dawn.” Roxy [the theater manager] was both surprised and relieved when the opening title brought forth a heavy laugh. Then, as one subtitle after another flashed on the screen, the laughter mounted until the audience was roaring with gusty approval. And Roxy, standing at the back of the house, realized he was present at a startling innovation. It is difficult to imagine the impact those written words had on the early-day audience. And next morning the movie critic of *The New York Times* said, in essence, “satire has invaded the screen; the movies are growing out of their infancy.” (8)

Anita Loos’s spectacular potential was unveiled. Reflecting in a July 1918 article in *Photoplay Magazine*, Loos recalls a time when the ideal film needed no titles. But, the “pursuit of this ideal,” she explains, “soon reduced the motion picture to mere pantomime, and greatly narrowed the range of subjects with which the motion picture could deal” (Loos and Emerson 88). “[A]s much care should be taken in writing the titles,” she offers, “as in producing the picture itself” (Loos and Emerson 89).

Loos, both in her earliest work for Fairbanks and in her later autobiographical renderings of it, was a master at indirection. For instance, no historians of film have questioned her retelling that *Papers* was accidentally shipped to New York, and no one has otherwise explained how it is

that Loos happened to be in the theater that night in New York (though, perhaps she received a note from Roxy), the culmination of a week-long train ride from California. This small ambiguity is indicative of Loos's style: she is a master at eliding her own rhetorical exigence. It is, autobiographically, a much more powerful story if her film is shelved and "accidentally" winds up on the New York screen, providing a crucial element of what Ann Douglas refers to as the "opportunities for democratization and pluralism that culminated in the early modern era in the development of the media" and its subsequent grasp on "the American psyche" (3). Loos, in her retelling, wants to grasp the American psyche without appearing to.

Absolutely no language in her otherwise perspicuous autobiographical retelling in *Good-bye* goes to Fairbanks's performance in the film. Loos, without ever saying it, makes clear to her readers who the real heavyweight is in these early days with Fairbanks. She explains half-facetiously, "working with Doug continued to seem like child's play, and, at the same time, it was making us rich" (9). That sentiment is repeated and sometimes amplified as Loos developed a taste for aiming rhetoric (rhetoric that denies the potential for a response, counter-propositional rhetoric) at powerful men; her rhetoric is defined by its formal elements. To be more specific, in the case of the retelling of her creation of the Fairbanks-man, Loos employs what Tom Huckin calls implicational and presuppositional silences, which demonstrate, in both cases, an activation of audience (consciousness-raising) as well as an elision of exigence. Implicational and presuppositional silences, for Huckin, are "collaborative silences, because they induce the reader to provide the appropriate information desired by the writer" (4). Huckin further divides these kinds of silences into their "benign" and "manipulative" functions, language I do not care for. Rather than benign and manipulative, these silences could be read as intentional and

unintentional, in terms of exigence. What Huckin calls manipulative silences are those that are implicitly rhetorical, those that are used to get something done.

Joseph Janangelo articulates the need for studies such as this one, studies of celebrity rhetoric. Rhetorical analysis of celebrities entails the continued interrogation of the relation between what is said and what is meant, what is honesty and what is showmanship. Janangelo explains,

The idea that fans expect honesty from celebrities finds purchase in star studies.

Samantha Barbas writes that “the history of film fandom between 1910 and 1950 is a story of passion, admiration, and intense curiosity” (185). The public surely valued talent and beauty, yet “none of these [things] could compare with the highest compliment that a fan could give a star –that of being sincere” (115).

Barbas writes that the search for “reality and authenticity” (162) fueled fans’ literate activities: “[B]y reading about their idol’s offscreen experiences, fans reassured themselves that there was a human behind the image. Underneath the makeup and bright lights, there was a living, breathing person who seemed as honest and genuine as the worshipping fans” (125). (166)

Without a doubt by 1916 the star system in Hollywood was incipiently available (indeed it was being formed), and Anita Loos’s first adaptation of the Fairbanks-man played with the culture in which she worked.

Loos both used and circumvented honesty’s emergent cultural value, where the expectation of honesty became quickly the tone of banal politics as well as the subtext for tell-all magazines and a *modus operandi* for the literary moderns who, as Ann Douglas explains, held up honesty as a cultural totem.

What was Loos's exigency, then, in that first creation of the Fairbanks-man? On a personal note, Loos had every reason to lampoon Fairbanks for Griffith, whose distaste for the actor was palpable, and since Loos was close with Griffith and respected him much, not to mention craved his attention, the best medium for criticizing Fairbanks was a filmic surprise, one that would lighten Griffith's load after the fallout from *Birth of a Nation*. Secondly, Loos wanted to impress Emerson, whom she considered much more in the know than Fairbanks, and having caught Loos's scent early, he encouraged it. Lastly, though, and of much more import for this study, putting *His Picture in the Papers* represented a way for Loos to construct and comment upon an empty vehicle of spectacular American masculinity right on the cusp of its crisis moment just before the First World War, a critique whose signifying power came in exactly the discrepancy between the body-on-film's vivacity and the character's complete lack of self-awareness or agency.

Loos used Fairbanks as a masculinity-minstrel, and her rhetoric demonstrated an interesting attempt at (what looks suspiciously like) feminist consciousness-raising through implicational and presuppositional silences. By overtly leaving out Fairbanks's character, Loos collaborated with her audience on the limits of masculine potential through a meta-meditation on the role of men in the public sphere.³⁴ Both onscreen and in real life, Loos knew she was putting *His Picture in the Papers* – was making Fairbanks a famous buffoon – and she reveled in the behind-the-scenes power that entailed. She was doing so at a moment in American culture where the question of defining masculinity was particularly important, “an era marked by fears of national and masculine enfeeblement,” a “transitional period that led to” what Studlar calls “a

³⁴ Ironically, Loos's manipulation of the absent Fairbanks-man was, for her, at least to a degree, an accurate rendering of the star's own lack of self-awareness. As she says in *Photoplay Magazine*'s July 1918 article, “Speeches should always be written in the language that the character himself would use, and a brilliant or sarcastic speech should never be put into the mouth of a character whose method of expression in real life would be commonplace” (Loos and Emerson 89).

veritable obsession with the attainment of masculinity” (13). Loos’s rhetoric lingered on the precipice of a cultural vacuum.

Papers begins with a wordy and sophisticated subtitle, which is immediately juxtaposed with the Fairbanks-man, who seems to signify only lack,³⁵ an abject puppet, highlighting the complex rhetorical distance between our ever-present but hidden writer and her protagonist. Her titles were the real star of the show, as hinted in her autobiographical retelling. Loos employed a new rhetorical technology. Laura Frost, who tends to read her as tap dancing on the peripheries of the moderns, explains,

Captions and intertitles were understood as an “intrusion of the literary into what should be an essentially pictorial realm.” They were not, in the early 1910s, considered an artistic form for individual authorship, but were anonymous and banal placeholders. Loos changed this. (296)

While I question Frost’s implication that Loos saw this opportunity as a place to demonstrate her “art,” I do agree that Loos saw *Papers* as an opportunity to demonstrate her talent for humor, for mastery of this wild and newly emergent medium. Loos shied away from the modernist crowd as much as she shied away from the feminist crowd – she did not carry a message; rather, she was a master of a medium – someone Marshall McLuhan might have noticed. Loos, in many ways, saw herself as a provider of perspective, not its victim. Frost goes on to argue, rightfully, that this film “[f]undamentally change[d] the concept of cinematic pleasure as passive vision” by “creating an active audience to whom” it “offered a new kind of pleasure,” what Frost calls “literary visual pleasure” (297). Yes and no; Frost’s interesting analysis misses the radical import of Loos’s exigence, focusing only on the modalities of her titles and not their critical end.

³⁵ This is, highly likely, Loos’s nod to Freud.

On the other hand, Frost astutely points out the activating (activist?) capacity of Loos's work in *Papers*. The first screen title suggests:

Publicity at any price has become the predominant passion of the American people. May we beg leave to introduce to you as a shining disciple of this modern art of "three-sheeting", Proteus Prindle, producer of Prindle's 27 Vegetarian Varieties [which include Gluten Globules, Macerated Morsels, Predigested Prunes, Perforated Peas, Dessicated Dumplings, etc.]

Proteus Prindle is not the star of *Papers*, though. His son is. Fairbanks plays Pete Prindle, "who prefers pugilism to pushing Prindle's products," and is introduced early as lazy, decadent, and completely unaware of himself or the position of privilege he is born into – the result is a flamboyant witlessness, one with less delicacy and charm than his pal Chaplin's. He proves this over and over. In order to win the hand of his love interest, Peter Prindle attempts time and again (one gets the feeling that this algorithm could go on forever) to get his picture in the papers to provide publicity for his father's company, despite the fact that he prefers steak and martinis over his father's vegetarian fare.

Pete's problems proliferate in a scene in which his father asks him to fill in for a sick employee. "The pay-roll clerk is sick. See if, for once in your life, you can do some work." Pete agrees and then immediately vacates the premises to pursue his own mindless agenda of time-wasting and womanizing. Furious with Pete's lack of responsibility, his father offers him an ultimatum. "What have you ever done for Prindle's Products? Look at how your sisters are boosting them!" (He shows Pete his sisters' picture in the *Vegetarian Gazette*). "Huh!" Pete replies, "The *Vegetarian Gazette*? Why if I wanted to cut loose, I could get my picture into every regular paper in New-York!" "Well," his father goads, ... Go and do it. And don't come

near me till you've made good." Pete calls his love interest and explains, "It's easy! All I've got to do is get my picture in the papers."

Loos's titles clearly convey a critique of masculinity as it is packaged in celebrity. Her question is, "What is a man?" And behind that question is the question, "What is work?" Other questions hovering over the text include "What is the public?", "What is fame?", and "What does it say about a culture if we answer the crisis of masculinity with its spectacularization?" *Papers* is anything but a peon to American industriousness. It is a commentary on the absolute vacuity of (a) celebrity, the instability of American masculinity, and the Fairbanks-man's lack of (the performance of) intelligent will. In his pursuit of achieving public notoriety, the Fairbanks-man, among other things, sends his car off a cliff and pretends to be injured in the wreck, engages in fights with police, attempt to visit a psychic, Vera Crewes, but gets drunk first at which time his inebriated friends send him on a ship to Vera Cruz, engages in several boxing matches, and ultimately accidentally stops a train wreck, just by being at the right place at the right time. Loos doesn't give the Fairbanks-man agency, even in his moment of victory. He simply happens to arrive at the site of a train wreck planned by the "Weasels," an evil gang out to rob the rich. In the end, then, the Fairbanks-man does get his picture in the papers and gets the girl, but he remains unaware and unchanged from the ne'er-do-well he began as, even as he watches the papers exaggerate algorithmically the numbers of people he saved, to his great pleasure.

As the film ends, the audience is left with a meditation on masculine power, the limits of fame, and a kind of backward recognition that Douglas Fairbanks was somehow absent the whole time. In this way, Loos's early work on the Fairbanks-Man serves as both a prelude and an inversion of her later work on Lorelei Lee. As Catherine Keyser explains in *Playing Smart*, Loos (along with Dorothy Parker and Lois Long) "exaggerate the presence of the flesh ... and

then project it elsewhere (onto another character, for example) to achieve dual aims” (17). For Keyser, who looks mainly at Loos’s work in *Blondes*, this tendency to use bodies to “point out distortions” allowed Loos, Parker, and Long to “access ironic sensibilities and professional status typically denied to the sexualized woman” (17). If Loos, as Keyser argues, successfully “undermines the potency of the gaze by establishing the primacy of narrative voice” in *Blondes*, she is able to accomplish this, mainly, because of her work for Fairbanks where, due to the visual aspects of the filmic medium, the body-on-screen is much harder to force into submission to narrative (65). If “Loos’s representation of Lorelei’s excessive sexuality establishes the uneasy status of the career woman,” her depiction of the Fairbanks-Man undermines the validity and prowess of the masculine (75). In particular, Loos’s portrayal of “this doubleness of character” (Keyser 63) demonstrates the opposite of what analyst Joan Riviere calls in her famous 1929 essay “Womanliness as Masquerade,” that “women who wish for masculinity may put on a mask of womanliness to avert anxiety and the retribution feared from men” (35). In Loos’s case, the Fairbanks-Man exemplifies the very constructedness of masculinity-as-masquerade, especially in *Papers*, where all the definitive characteristics of masculinity (libido, desire, agency, power)³⁶ removed from the protagonist, defamiliarizing the masculine and undercutting its rhetorical power. As a powerful woman, Loos, as Keyser (following Riviere) suggests, may have donned “feminine” characteristics, they only serve to cover over a crucial element of gendered, indirect rhetoric (as well as facilitating her own move into the public sphere). But the removal of agency and desire from Fairbanks’ otherwise frenetic on-screen image works to denaturalize his own, gendered status, undermining his physical potency through the draining of desire-power, the most fundamental of masculine characteristics.

³⁶ These characteristics indicate Loos’s

As “womanliness therefore could be assumed as worn as a mask,” the mask of manliness could be removed (Riveire 38). Ever the devout Freudian, Riveire goes so far as to call “womanliness and the ‘masquerade’” one and “the same thing,” Loos demonstrates much the same for masculinity, and masculinized modern culture’s seemingly aimless pursuit of conquest without content (38). Riviere’s notion, though, that women who wield powerful critique such as this need be wary of popular retribution applies very nicely to Loos’s situation, hence her indirect critique-as-humor approach to scenario and title writing: humor was both the medium for critique and its balm. Riveire goes on, speaking of a power-though-anxious female analysand of hers: “She has to treat the situation of displaying her masculinity to men as a ‘game,’ as something *not real*, as a ‘joke,’” a technique that probably less describes the woman’s particular unconscious pathologies and more describes the structure of patriarchic public power (39). Noteworthy, too, is the fact that Riveire, herself an analysand of Freud, was subject to much the same diagnosis as the one she foists upon her patient. In “Joan Riviere and the Masquerade,” Stephen Heath unveils a 1921 letter in which Ernest Jones recommends Riviere to Freud for analysis:

It is a case of typical hysteria, almost the only symptoms being sexual anesthesia and unorganized Angst, with a few inhibitions of a general nature. ... She has a most colossal narcissism imaginable, to a great extent secondary to the refusal of her father to give her a baby and her subsequent masculine identification with him. (Heath 45)

Not only does this unfortunate letter exhibit exactly the type of largely invisible masculine power structures to which powerful women were subject, it creates a messy and complex lens through which Riviere can be read: she is the woman who creates a mask of femininity to deal with

powerful men, as, I think, is Loos. The difference, though, is that what Riviere sees as Freud's truth, Loos sees as gendered spectacle.

The Fairbanks-man, a cultural elite, gives “a credible performance of authority” only insofar as “elites are likely to subscribe to the values that underwrite their privilege,” and Pete Prindle's privilege – along with his moral ambiguity and intellectual vacuity – is his only defining characteristic (Scott 66). He is, as it were, privilege-in-motion. Loos's radical though coded message via Fairbanks is that systems of “domination” are “stable, effective, and here to stay,” though her elision of her exigence makes it clear that this radical message is coded through Loos's own (in 1916 and later in her autobiographical writings about this event) investment in the production of herself as involved in a kind of ritual subservience, a hedge that what she is doing is not radical at all. As in her Fairbanks-man critique, Loos cultivates subservience to her audience's expectations of traditional gender roles through rituals of elision while at the same time radically activating audiences to messages about gender and power that would never find publics had they come in traditionally propositional format, hence her revulsion of feminists. For Loos, the creation of the Fairbanks-man is a powerful pre-propositional nudge designed to bring about the audience's own assertions about gender, power, and the role of the spectacle.

To be fair to Fairbanks, this critique is most stringent in *Papers*, though it does rear its head occasionally in the other films that Loos writes for him between 1916 and 1919. In *Papers*, Loos had the occasion to push her satirical talents as far as they could go with nothing to lose, as she anticipated the film would be her first and last for Fairbanks. Things became more complicated, though, when Fairbanks, almost overnight, became one of the most popular men on the planet. According to Richard Schickel,

[W]hat Fairbanks and the entire first generation of stars had to do, besides play their roles, was to serve as transitional figures in an era of revolutionary change in media, change that was both creator and creation of a similar revolution in mass sensibility. ... What happened in this period was that the public ceased to insist that there be an obvious correlation between achievement and fame. (7)

While Loos's invention of the Fairbanks-man of *Papers* is clearly an indictment of this kind of mass-sensibility, particularly as it lauded the kind of empty-masculinity Fairbanks performed onscreen. If Loos saw Fairbanks as transparent in *Papers*, she utilized this transparency, this vacuity of Prindle's privilege, to break into the consciousness of mass audience, an audience for whom (for the first time in American cinema's history)

the stars and celebrities – were as familiar to us as our friends and neighbors. In many respects we were – and are – more profoundly involved with their fates than we are with those of most of the people we know personally. They command enormous amounts of psychic energy and attention. (8)

One of the most surprising byproducts of Loos's invention of the clearly spectacularized (i.e., depthless) Fairbanks-man is that though she saw putting his picture in the papers, literally, as a subversive act, saw it as demonstrating that the Fairbanks-man was a function of an American crisis of masculinity, not a response to it; he instead helped to transition the culture into a spectacularized one that eschews depth for surface, though despite (or because of this) it was not long until Fairbanks had "followings at home and abroad that a president might envy" (Douglas 19).

For French Situationist Guy Debord, the cinematic spectacle that created such enormous audiences and mass-adoration for Fairbanks, "proclaims the predominance of

appearances and asserts that all human life, which is to say all social life ... is mere appearance,” becoming a “negation of life that has invented a visual form of itself” (14). Indeed, one thing that Conor’s take on the spectacularization of the modern woman tells us is that the spectacle also carries with it a dependence on appearance, an ominous dimension. Stars like Fairbanks, particularly at this cultural moment defined by the rise of cinematic spectacle, the imminence of World War I, and the collective insecurity surrounding cultural definitions of masculinity, become for Debord “the opposite of ... individual[s]” (39). Loos’s Fairbanks-man demonstrated and parodied the fact that

entering the spectacle as a model to be identified with, he renounces all autonomy in order himself to identify with the general law of obedience to the course of things. Stars of consumption, though outwardly representing different personality types, actually show each of these types enjoying an equal access to the whole realm of consumption and deriving exactly the same satisfaction therefrom. ... The admirable people who personify the system are indeed well known for not being what they seem to be; they have achieved greatness by embracing a level of reality lower than that of the most insignificant individual life. ... [They conceal] the unity of poverty. (Debord 39-41)

For Loos, whose love of larceny was often proclaimed, the tautology of the spectacle (and the Fairbanks-man) is clear: “its means and ends are identical” (15). Rhetoric becomes reality, the visual a red herring. Loos, a scenarist by trade, saw potential in the very inhumanity of the spectacle, of film. Loos often recalls that she had only seen film as a dodge, a fluke, a hustle.

The emptiness embodied by the Fairbanks-man became a rhetoric-machine that is impossible to answer except in its own abstracted, parodic, imagined space and according to the

logics of implicational and pre-propositional assertions. Loos's place in relation to Fairbanks gave her full access to the public sphere, a platform from which she could create or critique public ethos, making male blindness occupy humorous space, making it do tricks, not to mention, Loos was getting famous doing this (something Fairbanks would take issue with). "By the end of Loos's series of Fairbanks films, the trade paper mentioned her title writing nearly every time they discussed a film on which she had worked" (Hefner 111). Consequently, Loos maintained a coy prostration to the star, outwardly at least. In my view, Loos used the Fairbanks-man to isolate and critique male power. Eventually, Fairbanks caught on. As she explains in *A Girl Like I*,

After I had written all Doug's movies for the first exciting two years of his career, things began to go badly between him and me. Doug had developed a fierce self-sufficiency that made him dislike depending on anyone but himself for anything. The situation reached a climax when the *Ladies' Home Journal* published a picture of me seated on a movie set in the type of camp chair always reserved for the privileged; the underlying capture called me, in effect, the little girl responsible for making Douglas Fairbanks a star. (178)

In an unusually brusque moment, Loos recalls that she felt "Doug had an honest basis for resentment" (178). However, she quickly backs up:

That I was the first to write his own personality into film was true enough, and that he was no actor Doug freely admitted. But he didn't need me; his unusual talents would have come to the fore in either the theater or the films without outside help from anyone. (178)

Thinking autobiographically, this construction of presuppositional silence is a noteworthy move for Loos to make. This is what Janangelo calls “reparative rhetoric” in celebrity life-writing. What is Loos repairing? Here, even late in life, Loos is constructing her own self image as unaware, lucky, more the product of serendipity than cunning and focus. Loos was a pivotal player in the construction of spectacular masculinity in a time when “women’s throwing off of traditional social and sexual strictures” effected on men a crisis of national proportions (Studlar 22).

Loos would bristle at the notion that she was a harbinger of radical, if coded, feminist critique, I am sure. The persona put forth in her autobiographies makes it very clear both how she remembered and how she wanted to be remembered. In *Kiss Hollywood Good-bye*, she recalls,

I also find those old datebooks useful in exposing some event I once considered to be earth-shaking. One night I kept a rendezvous with a sophisticated European film director which I, as a Hollywood novice, found so unforgettable it only needed to be recorded with a fingerprint in lipstick. Had I written that occasion up “in depth” when it took place, it would have been a pack of lies because today I can’t remember his name to give him a belated screen credit. (2)

Here, characteristically, Loos drops hints about the way she wants history to read her. She explains, “I’m against diaries and all for datebooks, because memory is more indelible than ink” (2). So, Anita Loos at once underscores and problematizes the notion of the spectacular modern woman insofar as the legacy of her work survives not so much in her explicit self-apprehension but self-denial, her unique ability to apprehend others’ performances of gendered identity and to activate publics in response to the implicit questions those performances raise. Anita Loos’s

radical feminism is that of a gadfly, an irritant, a force prone to disrupt the seemingly smooth surfaces of gender and spectacle, to plant in her audiences, in some cases at least, the ability to unearth the hidden discontinuities of the public transcript, that written, unalterable tome on the nature and location of public domination, remaining an unknown and unknowable presence to all but a very few.

From Fairbanks to Mencken, From Film Titles to Literature

Loos's rhetorical performances above, around, and through Fairbanks are the first of a series of dramas of rhetorical indirection in her life, each one associated with a different man. After Fairbanks, Loos tackles her friend and idol H.L. Mencken in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1925). Loos's protagonist, as *Blondes* shows early on, is a product of larceny; she is named by it. Early in the book, Lorelei relates to her diary that, having been called to the house of her boss, Mr. Jennings, who has recently hired her as a secretary (despite her complete inability to type or take dictation), much to her chagrin she

found a girl there who really was famous all over Little Rock for not being nice. So when I found out that girls like that paid calls on Mr. Jennings I had quite a bad case of hysterics and my mind was really a blank and when I came out of it, it seems that I had a revolver in my hand and it seems that the revolver had shot Mr. Jennings. ... [During the trial, the District Attorney] was quite harsh and called me names that I would not even put in my diary. Because everyone at the trial except the District Attorney was really lovely to me and all the gentlemen in the jury all cried when my lawyer pointed at me and told them that they practically all had either a mother or a sister. So the jury was only out three minutes and then they came back and acquitted me and they were all so lovely that I really had to

kiss all of them and when I kissed the judge he had tears in his eyes and he took me right home to his sister. I mean it was when Mr. Jennings became shot that I got the idea to go into the cinema, so Judge Hibbard got me a ticket to Hollywood. So it was judge Hibbard who really gave me my name because he did not like the name I had because he said a girl ought to have a name that ought to express her personality. So, he said my name ought to be Lorelei which is the name of a girl who became famous for sitting on a rock in Germany. (Loos, *Blondes* 26)

Lorelei slides in and out of perilous situations because of and through her liquid sex appeal, her femininity somehow salving the disparities apparent to the audience but not to Lorelei. For instance, she *was* the kind of girl who paid visits to men like Mr. Jennings. Again, when Mr. Jennings, in a strange and automatic way, “becomes shot,” the reader again is taken through this euphoric periphery of Lorelei’s absence of self-knowledge or responsibility (a delicious critique of the liberal-individualist fantasy). Susan Hegeman argues,

Remade into the siren who lures men to their deaths, Lorelei’s problematic relationship to agency is made explicit: is she a sexual predator, or is she an innocent party; does she coax men into recklessness, or is she the passive object of their dangerous passions? Is she or is she not a ‘professional lady’ as the book’s subtitle suggests? This question of Lorelei’s agency, and the related one of her actual intelligence, hovers over the text. (534)

Rather than being punished and imprisoned for her deed, Lorelei is renamed, reborn to the world and sent to Hollywood. Hollywood itself becomes a kind of rhetorical space. In what is perhaps the most radical of all subversive approaches, *Blondes* and its protagonist become all things to all

people, a projection screen for male fantasy. The courtroom scene is critical to this analysis because in it, one set of generic expectations (the scene, language, and behavior of the courtroom) are all subverted by Lorelei's ability to allow herself to be used; she is shrewd but her shrewdness comes often in her graceful manipulation of the genres of expectation embedded in each rhetorical scene.

Though Loos often commented that she was far closer to Dorothy, Lorelei's best friend in the book, Lorelei represents her author in at least one way: without vocalizing it, she demonstrates evidence of being code and genre-savvy. Because her radical status is never explicit, she is subject to a frame of objectification that both the author and her protagonist exploit. Indeed, as Loos famously asked, in regard to her first marriage, "Did I feel no guilt over deserting my husband without even a note of explanation? I'm afraid my compulsion to get away from home was too strong for me to give Frankie much thought" (*Girl* 90). Both women are propelled by mechanical forces that provide potential but (at least in Lorelei's case) never explicit alibis. As Regina Barreca puts it, "[t]he strength behind Loos's heroines lies not in their sexuality per se but in the fact that they remain on the periphery of social and cultural structures;" indeed, Lorelei and Dorothy "embrace, and thereby simultaneously parody and undermine, the rituals of the powerful" (xiii). Unlike her first marriage, Loos's second was enmeshed in emotional machinery that she could not escape. Therefore, her creation of Lorelei is half a fantasy and half an accusation, Lorelei becoming the vehicle by which masculine limitations are explicated, a walking exegesis of male weakness/blindness/expectation.

Lorelei walks innocently through the middle of a murder trial unscathed, despite her clear responsibility for the crime; she offers no explanation or excuses and only allows herself to be spoken for and about, demonstrating superiority without ever acknowledging complicity. Here,

she functions as an analogue of Loos's rhetorical strategy. Lorelei's character evades direct confrontation with male power: femininity is used to camouflage her as she allows herself to be named, objectified, and externalized – her intension/intention rendered impossible and (largely) unnecessary. On Loos's part, this move demonstrates an implicit acknowledgment that since dominant discourses are “rarely naked and never monolithic,” neither should their rejection be (Pare 60). To take Audre Lorde's famous metaphor, Lorelei doesn't use the master's tools to tear down the master's house; she uses the master's tools to occupy the master's house, while he cheerfully sets up a tent on the lawn. That said, Loos's very technique of indirection has made her work and its critique subject to a kind of co-optation that Lorde herself would, I am sure, not feel comfortable with. Here, Loos's Metis-like quality is operationalized.

To Loos's credit as a code smith, the general public has not read *Blondes* as radical feminism and did not see it as a coded uptake aimed at undermining patriarchy and the objectification of women. To most readers, it was light fare, fun, simple, perhaps ironic. In my view, though, Lorelei becomes the exemplar of a culture fraught with blind male privilege (perhaps somewhat the result of the 1920s' burgeoning speculative economy), the market-oriented approach to men's fantasies about women's bodies and minds, and an instrument of their delegitimation; she is a figure of the feminist apocalypse, the end of overt male power and the beginning of covert female power, a power enhanced by its evasion of overt proclamations.

Loos's late distaste for the women's liberation movement in the 1970s was framed in much the same way. As noted, she considered feminists who wanted to “out” women's superiority simplistic because that approach created a stage for an unanswerable male counterpoint. By contrast, the Lorelei-approach circumvented the potential for retribution (or even discussion) through the guerilla occupation of male stereotypes as handed down,

generically speaking, from the woman's film – a protective, even palliative disarmament of potential response. To fight Lorelei, men would need to fight their own expectations, their own visions of female potential – and, ultimately, their self-definition. As the young, unnamed protagonist of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* is told by his dying grandfather, a man who had seemed timid his entire life, "Live with your head in the lion's mouth ... let 'em swoller you till they vomit or bust wide open" (16).

A few notable contemporaries picked up on something special in Loos's novella -- though most did not define or name the vehicle for Loos's radical vision. Harvard philosopher George Santayana, for instance, called *Blondes* a "great work of philosophy" (qtd. in Carey 98). Lorelei's lack of "awareness" is functionally similar to Charlie Chaplin's tramp in *Modern Times*, who, according to Roland Barthes, demonstrates that "[t]o see someone who does not see is the best way to be intensely aware of *what* he does not see" (40). That Loos and Chaplin could potentially (and unconsciously?) share strategies is not impossible, considering that the two spent considerable time together (through Chaplin's third wife Paulette Goddard, one of Loos's closest friends in the 1920s and 1930s). *Modern Times* was released in 1936, 11 years after *Blondes*.

In addition to Santayana's praise, Loos's novella received positive accolades from a surprising set of literary elites. "James Joyce, whose failing eyesight made him highly selective about what he read" spent three days on the book, and Edith Wharton called *Blondes* "the great American novel (at last)" (Carey 98, 108). Aldous Huxley, living in England at the time of *Blondes*' publication, requested a meeting with Loos upon his next trip to the U.S., eventually becoming her close friend and confidante, replacing H.L. Mencken as her "intellectual idol." Even William Faulkner expressed his wish that he "had created Dorothy first" (Carey 108).

These luminaries of literary accomplishment noticed what the more banal literary critics of the day did not.

Most critics of the day were largely put off by the book. For instance, Wyndham Lewis, a modernist critic, was unimpressed by what he read as Lorelei's "illiteracy, hypocrisy, and business instinct," and he faulted Loos's readers for supporting a work that so shamelessly adapted itself to the market (Hegeman 528). But what Lewis and most others have missed is what John Frow calls the thickness of Loos's generic frame: *Blondes* works as "a narrative about sex, work, and economic exchange; and as an object of exchange in its own right," in addition to the personal rhetorical exigency it created for Loos in her own life (Hegeman 527). What makes scholarship about *Blondes* difficult, though, is that Loos, like Lorelei, never admits her complicity on any of the levels of critique on which this book functions. For her, at least explicitly, this book was simply a witty response to her friend and unrequited love, H.L. Mencken.

The famous anecdote concerning the origin of *Blondes* was often retold by Loos, and it took a few different forms in her autobiographical writing. In "Biography of a Book," she writes

There was a time a number of years ago when I found myself on a train, the deluxe *Santa Fe Chief*, traveling from New York to Los Angeles. We were a party of co-workers in the movies, in route to our studio after a cherished holiday in New York, for we belonged to the elite of cinema which has never been fond of Hollywood. There were Douglas Fairbanks, Sr., then at the beginning of his career in films but already a nation's idol, my husband, John Emerson, who directed the scenarios I wrote for Doug and a number of others. ... Also among us was a blonde who was being imported to Hollywood to be Doug's leading lady in

his forthcoming picture. Now this girl, although she towered over me (I weighed about ninety pounds) and was of rather a hearty type, was being waited on, catered to and cajoled by the entire male assemblage. If she happened to drop the novel she was reading, several men jumped to retrieve it; whereas I was allowed to lug heavy suitcases from their racks while men sat about and failed to notice my efforts. ... We were both in the pristine years of early youth; we were of about the same degree of comeliness; as to our mental acumen, there was nothing to discuss. ... Then why did that girl so far outdistance me in feminine allure? Could her strength possibly be rooted (like that of Sampson) in her hair? ... I proceeded to go over the various blondes I knew. They were a very special group, for my lot had fallen in with the beauties of the films and the girls of the Ziegfeld Follies from which movies starlets were constantly recruited. And, in going over the list, I presently singled out the dumbest blonde of all, a girl who had bewitched one of the keenest minds of our era – H.L. Mencken. Menck was my idol and a good friend also. ... Menck liked me very much indeed; but in the matter of sentiment, he preferred a witless blonde. ... [I wanted] to give Menck a laugh at his own expense. (xxxviii)

Like her protagonist, Loos was “innocent” of a murder(ous critique), despite a smoking gun. But, over and above Loos’s romantic and intellectual crush on Mencken and her unrequited feelings, *Blondes* was less a response to his falling for “witless” blondes and more significantly an uptake of Mencken’s 1918 book *In Defense of Women*, in which the central claim is that women are superior to men. As the adversaries of a physically and institutionally superior opposition, women had to become smarter and more subversive in order to survive.

In *Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche, Mencken's own idol, put it this way.

They walk among us as embodied reproaches, as warnings to us – as if health, well-constitutedness, strength, pride, and the sense of power were in themselves necessarily vicious things for which one must pay some day, and they pay bitterly: how ready they themselves are at bottom to *make* one pay; how they crave to be *hangmen*. (123)

As is her style, Loos never admits to acting as a hangman; nor does she admit having read Mencken's book at all, though *Blondes* is most certainly a response to it: Lorelei is an imprint (at some points) of Mencken's hyper-intelligent women, though Loos gives her a lack of awareness that creates an extra layer to Lorelei's frame and generic complexity. As with Mencken's typical style, *Women* was full of pithy aphorisms, a particularly masculine style (of course, Nietzsche had his own issues with women, especially Lou Salome). If Loos was going to offer a reasonable response to this, she could not attain to Mencken's stylistic or rhetorical persona, his ability to wield weighty propositions; she *had* to disguise her intentions in genre and further embed them in a protagonist completely unaware of (in fact immune to) her own implications. Coding her difference with Mencken, Loos ironically underscores Mencken's claim in *In Defense of Women* that a "man's women folk, whatever their outward show of respect for his merit and authority, always regard him secretly as an ass, and with something akin to pity" (1).

Loos's protagonist embodies Mencken's proclamation that in "whatever calls for no more than an invariable technic and a feeble chicanery she usually fails; in whatever calls for independent thought and resourcefulness she usually succeeds" while at the same time relegating that same proclamation (generically) to the pile of shoddy male machinery Mencken alludes to

(Mencken 13). Lorelei embodies the truth that if “the work of the average man required half the mental agility and readiness of resource of the work of the average prostitute, the average man would be constantly on the verge of starvation,” a truth from which Mencken himself seemed exempt (Mencken 15). Loos sees the misogyny embedded in Mencken’s use of Nietzsche. For Nietzsche, “woman especially: no one can excel her in the wiles to dominate, oppress, and tyrannize” (123). As Nietzsche argues, her power is “physiologically unfortunate and worm-eaten, a whole tremulous realm of subterranean revenge” that succeeds most by “*poisoning the consciousnesses* of the fortunate with [its] own misery” (124). With only a degree more subtlety Mencken expands, “it is precisely this physical frailty that has given women their peculiar nimbleness and effectiveness on the intellectual side” (39).

Loos’s genius is that she turns Mencken’s (and Nietzsche’s) superiority back upon itself, demonstrating a feedback loop of male blindness/arrogance/assumption (one that works even at the highest levels of male “awareness”). It is the same feedback loop that Lorelei repeatedly takes advantage of. According to Barreca,

Perhaps most tellingly, Lorelei [and Dorothy do] not pretend to helplessness or innocence, those twinned weapons for the traditional passive-aggressive feminine script. Unlike more ordinary heroines, they do not offer up a gooey reservoir of sympathy, vulnerability, and virginity, but instead offer a sense of savvy, skill, and shamelessness. Yet Lorelei and Dorothy always remain ladies (even when they are under arrest or getting drunk with the boys) because they are, more or less, in control of their destinies. They are closer to con artists³⁷ than to whores:

³⁷ Again, here Loos’s Metis-streak is emphasized.

they dazzle, they confuse, they indulge in the willingness of their audience to suspend disbelief. (xvii)

Lorelei demonstrates what Mencken misses: that genres, situations, and their boundaries as Anthony Pare argues, “cloak vested interests or imbalances in power” that may not be apparent to those in power, may not be manifest even to those who employ them (60).

It comes as no surprise that Loos codes deep critique in simplistic – even misspelled – language and cadence, while Mencken argues that the “vanity of man” has “caused him to attach a concept of attractiveness to feminine weakness, so that he has come to esteem in his woman, not in proportion as she is self-sufficient as a social animal but in proportion as she is dependent” (38). That women already know this according to Mencken does not change the bilious nature of his *In Defense of Women*, a book he wrote because Europe was cut off to him due to the first World War. Tellingly, for Mencken, *Women* was a pastime, a challenge to his own self-awareness posed only by himself and directed at a small audience he largely disdained -- Americans. “I wrote it in war-time, with all foreign markets cut off, and so my only possible customers were Americans,” he notes in the introduction of the text, a particularly problematic position considering Mencken’s explicit love of all things German (xix). Referring to his American audience, he continues,

Of their unprecedented dislike for novelty in the domain of the intellect I have often discoursed in the past, and so there is no need to go into the matter again.

All I need do here is to recall the fact that, in the United States ... there is a right way to think and a wrong way to think in everything. (Mencken xix)

He saw this project laying laymen on the pavement, exposing masculine weakness and, consequently, his own intellectual superiority. Though purportedly focused on the “weaker sex,”

this book proclaimed, mainly, Mencken's own prowess. Loos anticipates his dictum that men "must be attacked without any formal challenge, and even without any suspicion of challenge," taking as truth his recommendation of the "concealment of egoistic purpose, a code of ethics having for its foremost character a bold denial of its actual aim" (Mencken 51).

A Girl Can't Go on Laughing All the Time – Autobiography and John Emerson

What makes possible Anita Loos's critiques of both Fairbanks and Mencken is what Kenneth Burke would have called a crafty manipulation of the scene-agent ratio. This ratio corresponds to genre camouflage, the propensity that Loos has to wrap her serious critiques in cavalierly humorous or "unserious" texts. For instance, in Loos's writing of the "Fairbanks-man," neither Fairbanks at that point in time nor film carried much critical or artistic weight. For her critique of Mencken in *Blondes*, Loos wraps Lorelei's critique in seemingly unselfconscious language and then wraps it again in a feminized genre. In both cases Loos's work adheres to what Burke calls "the synechdochic relation ... between person and place," one that depicts a continuous relation of similar character or quality between "the nature of the inhabitants" of a space and the "terms of their habitation" (Burke *Grammar* 9). Such thickness of generic frame is much tougher to produce, though, when Loos attempts to critique her own husband, John Emerson, in a series of tell-all autobiographies written in the sixties and seventies during a period of cultural reminiscence and interest in early Hollywood. In both *A Girl Like I* and *Kiss Hollywood Good-bye*, Loos's critique of Emerson loses some power, though, because for the first time, Loos herself becomes a character in the stories she tells and becomes, consequently, entangled in a battle between truth-telling (revealing her lonely and abusive domestic situation) and alibi-structuring (convincing her readers that throughout it all she either chose it or maintained a guise of aloofness). She attempts, then, in her critique of Emerson, what

Sharon Halavi calls the attempts by women to “repair” their “life stor[ies]” (95), a move similar to Joseph Janangelo’s understanding of reparative rhetorics in celebrity life-writing (2010). In Loos’s case, we see a complex attempt to “compos[e] publicly to counter potentially credible and damaging discourse, and to redirect the conversation” (157). For Loos, the desire to remain humorous and relevant belied an inner turmoil tied directly to her relationship with Emerson. As her niece, Mary Anita Loos, explains, Loos clung to humor, which “spilled out of her writing to create laughter for the world, in spite of the secret sadness of her lonely life,” in particular her

sadness about her marriage to a man who always clung to her talent, who ostensibly had married her to be her collaborator when, in fact, she did all the work. He had numerous affairs. He also squandered her enormous fortune from *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, lost everything in the stock market, and left her with a loneliness she tried to forget with her ever-moving pen while he retired on a large annuity [with money he had shifted out of Loos’s accounts without her knowing].

(xii)

The picture of Loos offered here works strongly against the simple, whimsical, and disinterested character she hoped history would accept. Biographer Cari Beauchamp explains that scholars interested in Loos are bound to discover a much more “complex, caring” person than they might expect to, as well as one who had, “at times,” a “conflicted personal life” (2).

It is this conflictedness that abounds in any careful reading of Loos’s autobiographies, and it indicates not only the complexity of her early rhetorical situations, situations that balanced precariously the power of public writing with the nonchalance of a dilettante. It is also this conflictedness that emerges in William Empson’s Loos-inspired poem. He writes,

No man is sure he does not need to climb

It is not human to feel safely placed.
'A girl can't go on laughing all the time.'
Wrecked by their games and jeering at their prime
There are who can, but who can praise their prime
No man is sure he does not need to climb.
Christ stinks of torture who was caught in lime.
No star he aimed at is entirely waste.
No man is sure he does not need to climb.
It is too weak to speak of right and crime.
Gentlemen prefer bound feet and the wasp waist.
A girl can't go on laughing all the time.
It gives a million gambits for a mime
On which a social system can be based:
No man is sure he does not need to climb,
A girl can't go on laughing all the time. (66)

Emerson was altogether a different subject to critique, then, because unlike both Fairbanks and Mencken, who courted the public more than they courted Loos, Emerson's betrothal to Loos implicated her in her own mistreatment. As Loos both suffered this and used it as cover for her critical edge, leading even her biographer Gary Cary to comment that "while occasionally concerned with feminist issues," most of Loos's work "ended by confirming male supremacy" (73). What better evidence that one is not a feminist than to perform the role of subservient spouse, especially if married to a cad? According to Cary,

She believed what she was joking about. Intellectual voluptuaries like Aspasia or Mesdames de Pompadour and de Staël were smarter and ended up happier than a Joan of Arc, who got burned for doing a man's job. Let men keep their illusions about being the stronger sex! (74)

To the degree that Loos was ambivalent about her feminist-critical orientation, Cary is right here, but his reading takes Loos too much at her own word, denying the great power of her critical renderings of powerful men. Loos's power always avoided overt propositional assertions and dealt with weighty issues with a light, ironic touch, often keeping her interiority completely invisible. In this way, Loos's indirection – particularly in her autobiographies of the 1960s and 1970s – demonstrate another instantiation of performative indirection, working against the very “sense of self as identity” that other autobiographies aim toward (Smith 108). Loos's autobiographical renderings, however, create the self not as self-identical interiority but rather as detached filter or casual witness.

After the duo parted ways with Fairbanks, they continued to make successful films, largely because the economics and feminized audience demographics of the 1920s were ripe for material, which Loos gladly admitted. After a few years in New York, though, particularly after the publication and vast success of *Blondes*, Loos's relationship with Emerson began to sour. She explains,

The day finally came when I discovered a letter from one of John's fellow socialists, expressing her joy over being able to compensate his unfulfilled marriage. When faced with that evidence, John disarmed me by bursting into tears. He bitterly regretted that he wasn't the marrying type; that he had never

wanted children; that his nerves were shattered by such a binding arrangement.
(12)

For her husband's vice, Loos takes the blame, continuing,

Tremulous with guilt over having made a great big grown man weep, I asked if he wanted a divorce. He grasped me in agitation. "No, no, no, Buggie! I'll never leave you; you're so gullible you might fall into the hands of some crook, who'd get hold of your money!" As an upshot, John worked out a friendly separation and granted me an allowance. "This arrangement will be much better for you, Buggie," he explained. "Because in the past you've always had to ask me for money. But now I'm giving my Bug some of her very own. (12)

The joke here is that though Loos accepts an allowance from her philandering husband, she is a rich woman. Her caustic irony in this rendering demonstrates how effectively Loos has figured her husband.

Rather than allowing this depressing moment to characterize her as a victim of Emerson's choices, as beholden to a man as cruel and larcenous as her father, Loos immediately turns it on its head, asking readers not to weep for her. She, a woman of means, prefers men like Emerson, laughs at his games. "Mr. E.," she explains, "was actually the forerunner of a type that was beginning to emerge in our country" (16).

From early Colonial days, sex life in America had been based on the custom of men supporting women. That situation reached its heyday in the Twenties when it was easy for any dabbler in stocks to flaunt his manhood by lavishing an unearned income on girls. But with the stock-market crash, men were hard put even to keep their wives, let alone spend money on sex outside the home. The

adjustment was much easier on women than on men, who jumped out of windows in droves, whereas I can't recall a single headline that read: KEPT GIRL LEAPS FROM LOVE NEST. (16)

As for Loos's autobiographical rendering of her marriage, it sets the stage for what is perhaps the most prominent of all her public effacements – her justification for Emerson's philandering, thieving, and violence. In her desire to tell a coherent narrative, one in which she is not victimized but somehow stands above the game, she remains unfazed and amused. In an unfinished manuscript (published after her death, titled after Emerson's poem about her "A Girl Can't Go on Laughing All the Time"), she observes that "along came Freud, bent on destroying the virility of man; trumping up the notion that everyone was sick; turning people into hypochondriacs and claiming illness as an alibi" (Loos *Fate* 62). She continues, reminiscing about the 1920s, "But when the trend of economics forced women to compete with men, they found out that, in the aggregate, women are smarter than they are and, as far as tenderness was concerned, the jig was up" (63).

Similar to Paul John Eakin's argument in *Thinking Autobiographically*, Loos's desire to create such a narrative differs little from other autobiographers who need to construct a narrative identity, which, in Loos's case, allows her a kind of last grasp at historiographical power and control over her own vocational history. Eakin:

[Charlotte] Linde discovered that when she investigated a particular form of "life story," the vocational accounts offered by white middle-class professionals in answer to the question, "What do you do?" [that] the notion of narrative identity is so deeply rooted in our culture that it functions as a criterion for normality: "In order to exist in the social world with a comfortable sense of being a good,

socially proper, and stable person,” she comments, “an individual needs to have a coherent, acceptable, and constantly revised life story” (3). (29)

Without a doubt, Loos’s version of her marriage in *Kiss Hollywood Good-by* is a major revision, if not of facts than of perspective, where she inverts the power-arrangement in the marriage in most cases, and in the cases where that is impossible due to certain facts (in the case of attempted murder, for instance), Loos makes light of things. Near the end of *Good-by*, she recalls Sherwood Anderson, author of *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919) and a friend of Emerson, urging Loos to be careful with Emerson. As she recalls, Anderson explained, “John has a psychopathic resentment of you! ... He’ll always belittle you, find mistakes in your work, put more and more commas into those manuscripts of yours. Take my word for it, Nita, John might even try to kill you” (187). And when the event occurs, as the reader is primed to believe it will, Loos, characteristically takes the blame. She explains,

My own experience in sex turned a strong-willed character I had adored into a sick man. If only we’d remained sympathetic co-workers without the complication of marriage, no stranger would ever have addressed Mr. E. as “Mr. Loos,” which made him try to kill me. (*Good-by* 196)

In this case, Emerson’s responsibility for violence is elided, as Loos casts him both as a victim of circumstance and also potentially mentally ill.

One evening we were alone together in our living room when, without warning, he clutched my throat and started to choke me. He justified himself by the same type of argument that Scott Fitzgerald had pulled on Zelda and me, “My little Bug is too good to live in a terrible world like this!” which wasn’t much comfort. Mr. E. was strong and wiry, while I weighed in at ninety pounds. Luckily our butler

came into the room that time just as Scott's had done. Mr. E. released me. (*Good-*
by 176)

Without a doubt, because of his proximity to Loos and her strong and ambivalent feelings for him, Emerson's characterizations in her autobiographies are more complex and are thus less clearly feminist than her previous depictions of Fairbanks and Mencken. In many ways, the lengths to which Loos goes to deliver her particular characterization of Emerson as somehow without agency works against her critical ethos, much more than with either Fairbanks or Mencken. Loos's critical distance and thickness of frame are imperiled a bit in her autobiographical work, by the tragic treatment she receives at Emerson's hands. Loos wants to obviate the clear tragedy of her domestic circumstance, thus disrupting what Kenneth Burke calls the dialectic of tragedy in *A Rhetoric of Motives*.

This is the process embodied in tragedy, where the agent's action involves a corresponding passion, and from the sufferance of the passion there arises an understanding of the act, an understanding that transcends the act. The act, in being an assertion, has called forth a counter-assertion in the elements that compose its context. And when the agent is enabled to see in terms of this counter-assertion, he has transcended the state that characterized him at the start. In this final state of tragic vision, intrinsic and extrinsic motivations are merged. That is, although purely circumstantial factors participate in his tragic destiny, these are not felt as exclusively external, or scenic; for they bring about a *representative* kind of accident, the kind of accident that belongs with the agent's particular kind of character. ... It is deplorable [on the other hand], but not tragic,

simply to be a victim of circumstance ... [as s]heer victimization is not an assertion. (38-39)

In her later autobiographical renderings, Loos clearly struggles with the meaning of her victimhood and bravely attempts her usual brazen style when describing her relationship with Emerson, painting him as a kind of kept man: “[A]s a connoisseur of that species I would like to come to its defense. ... Only in this crude culture of the New World was the kept man considered decadent” (17). Here, Loos’s indirection fails, uniquely in her writing, to keep buoyant the weight of the personal loneliness she experienced in the later third of her life. Rather than exploring the complexities of her intimacy issues with Emerson, Loos merely laughs him off, with less artistry than she practiced earlier in her career. She recalls,

I remembered back to the old Doug Fairbanks days when Mr. E.’s “collaboration” consisted of glancing over my morning’s work while he was eating breakfast in bed. From time to time he’d say, “But, Buggie, *this will never do!*” “What’s wrong, Mr. E.?” Shaking his head in despair he’d answer, “You’ve left out another comma, as usual!” (59)

What Loos does, in her memoirs, is to render Emerson not just a sad fool, a kept man, but *she actually renders him voiceless*. Not long after *Blondes*, Emerson suffers a bout of hysterical disphonia. In her depiction of Emerson by way of critique, the most powerful thing that Loos can do is to produce an image of castration in her husband. She explains,

But, back in 1926, my opportunities for service had been further increased, for I was able to take on the duties of a practical nurse. Mr. E. had been stricken with a dread form of laryngitis that prevented him speaking above a whisper. Following the instructions of his throat specialist, I applied ice packs and hot fomentations,

sprayed his throat, regulated his diet, and provided him with massage. But, for all my ministrations, Mr. E.'s voice only got weaker and, without daring to breathe the awful word, I began to think of ... cancer. (61)

After being advised to take her ailing husband to see Dr. Jelliffe, a throat specialist:

I kept that appointment in an agony of fear. The doctor began by saying it was urgent for me to know the truth about my husband and as I turned rigid with fright, he added, "There's nothing at all wrong with his throat. His loss of voice is the result of some sort of neurosis that can only be brought to light through psychotherapy. (62)

The poor man, suffering agonies over the success of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, had invented a disease as a means of attracting attention. Loos continues,

Dr. Jelliffe proceeded to quote from H.L. Mencken that a husband may survive the fact of a wife *having* more money than he, but if she *earns* more, it can destroy his very essence.

Overcome with guilt that I, myself, was the cause of Mr. E.'s distress, I asked how I could undo the harm I'd done. "The only possible cure for your husband," answered Dr. Jelliffe, "is to give up your career." (63)

After reporting that, though she did indeed give up her career, until the crashing stock market of the late 1920s created the need for her to return to Hollywood, her husband continued, once in a while, to occasionally forget his conceit of his lost voice and talk normally. Out of respect for the audacity of Emerson's affectation, Loos never called him on it. Finally, it took a visit to the world's most famous specialist, a Viennese, to cure the ailing Emerson.

Finally, at long last came a day when Mr. E. was cured. The specialist concerned was Professor Emil Glas of Vienna. ... One day Professor Glas called for me in private, just as Dr. Jackson had done in Philadelphia, but his plan was to perform an “operation.” During the process the Professor intended to scratch Mr. E.’s throat so severely that it would be quite painful for a few days. Following the “operation,” Mr. E. would be presented with a vial of alcohol in which some flecks of white membrane were floating. The Professor would explain them as “nodes” which he’d removed from Mr. E.’s vocal chords and, as soon as his throat healed, he would be able to speak again. (86-87)

The ploy worked, and Emerson, as Loos recalls, carried the nodes proudly with him for several months. And though the image rendered of Emerson here is tragicomic, Loos never blames the man. Indeed, her own unfinished essay (published after her death, titled after Empson’s poem about her “A Girl Can’t Go on Laughing All the Time”), she blames another Viennese: “[A]long came Freud, bent on destroying the virility of man; trumping up the notion that everyone was sick; turning people into hypochondriacs and claiming illness as an alibi” (Loos *Fate* 62).

Also in *Kiss Hollywood Good-bye*, Loos permits herself a strange moment of explicit ambivalence, one that moves in directly the opposite path of her earlier, more liberating and feminist critiques. On staying with the violent embezzler, Loos attributes this to her adoration of larcenous men, as well as an “atavistic hunger for that sort of mistreatment,” one, she argues, she shares with all American women (18). She explains that this type of relationship creates a new type of “sex experience” for women: “the thrill of ‘giving’ rather than ‘taking’” (18). She says, after all, placing her own authorial and gendered position in much the same place as Lorelei’s

ambivalent stance, that “[p]leasure that isn’t paid for is as insipid as everything else that’s free” (17).

Whether it is an atavistic or economic masochism, Loos’s autobiographical position is somewhat unsatisfying compared to her masterful earlier critiques of the likes of Fairbanks and Mencken. That is not surprising, though, as autobiographical writing forces Loos into the spotlight in a very different way than script or even novel writing. She becomes a character, and not only does she become responsible for making everyone around her characters as well, she has to anchor them in some way, with some sense of an internal self or core. That core, though, is not funny; it is too real for Loos to feel comfortable using. She is neither comfortable “constructing” subordination like she does with Lorelei nor with constructing herself as fundamentally dominant either. As James C. Scott argues, any analogies about subordination and domination become “more strained in contemporary settings where choice of marriage partner is possible and where women have civil and political rights” (22). In short, as Empson seems to suggest, Loos is partially “wrecked by [her] games,” is implicated, which creates a very difficult authorial and critical dilemma.

In the end, just as she does with the Fairbanks-man and with Lorelei’s counterpropositional rhetoric aimed toward Mencken, Loos, for the third time *removes a man’s voice* from the conversation. Even in its most problematic form, as it comes in her autobiographical work, Loos’s version of indirection, when employed, works against the potential for a counter-assertion and becomes, if only situationally, rhetoric that is not only indirect in its conveyance but is also subversive of the potential for any response. This is feminist indirect rhetoric *par excellence*. The spectacle, finally, fails Loos (as its lack of verisimilitude always eventually breaks down), who struggles between earnest constructions of

self and defending the life to which she acquiesced. Along the way, though, her unique abilities and positions in relation to public audiences provided her platforms and avenues to demonstrate what she knew all along: that women are smarter than men (an impression that remains dangerously close to Mencken's, Nietzsche's, and Schopenhauer's), that women can write more effectively (at least, that she can), and that the actualization of those truths is so bound up in the personal elements of lives, relationships, that, perhaps, the risk of indirection, the risk of being unheard, is still too great. Our job is to listen. In the end, as well, Loos, like Parker, is a humorist. She codes her critique in an erotic shell, like a dream. The exact content or meaning of Loos's dream remains lost to history, but its methods are clearer, as are the limits and functions of spectacular rhetoric, the spectacle functioning less as a means of disinformation and more as an invitation to closer analysis.

Chapter 4

Affective Feminist Indirection in the Writings of Mae West: Trauma, Testimony, and the Rhetoric of Exadversion

[W]hat will have followed the orgy – the orgy of meaning, truth, and representation – is seduction, and what will have preceded the orgiast – the philosopher – is Woman. Woman and/as seduction is what will have survived/resisted the modernist assault on the enchanted world and its denial of the play of appearances – an assault and denial accomplished via the tyranny of truth, subjectivity, and communication. – Michelle Ballif, *Seduction, Sophistry, and the Woman with the Rhetorical Figure*

She alone, out of an enormous and dull catalogue of heroines, does not get married at the end of the film, does not die, does not take the road to exile, does not gaze sadly at her declining youth in a silver-framed mirror in the worst possible taste; and she alone does not experience the bitterness of the abandoned “older woman.” She alone has no parents, no children, no husband. This impudent woman is, in her style, as solitary as Chaplin used to be. – Sidonie-Gabrielle Collette, *Collette at the Movies*

This chapter explores the ways in which Mae West, as writer, rhetor, and performer, strategically deployed indirect feminist rhetoric in order to (1) create a rhetorical character space and a rhetorical character, making use of *ekphrasis* and exadversion that underscored and fed her status as celebrity while subsequently erasing the traces of herself as a biographical person, (2) operationalize this sexualized character space to negotiate and come to terms with early sexual trauma, physical abuse, men, and power, (3) achieve Broadway success and fame, all the while retheorizing and complicating traditional views of homosexual desire and affect, particularly complicating early twentieth century notions of sexual inversion, and, (4), taking a third-wave revisionist lens influenced in part by Diane Davis, Michele Ballif, Kenneth Burke, and Judith Butler, as well as West’s contemporaries Sigmund Freud and Havelock Ellis, reread West as a

kind of covert (and perhaps unwitting) feminist agent, one whose own pursuit of fame and glory altered the landscape of gender and power, not to mention sex and celebrity, forever.

Mae West, Rhetorical Character Space, and *The Ruby Ring*

If, as Diane Davis argues, Kenneth Burke's largest contribution to rhetoric comes in his redirecting conversations about rhetoric from warlike metaphors of persuasion-as-domination to romantic metaphors of identification-as-courtship, that Mae West (1893-1980) and her work are not already represented in a brimming body of scholarship in rhetorical studies is surprising. A noteworthy exception to this dearth of scholarship on the rhetorical West is Helene Shugart and Catherine Waggoner's excellent *Making Camp*, which places West as a gauche, pioneering foremother of such contemporary camp icons as Gwen Stefani, Karen Walker, Macy Gray, and Xena: Warrior Princess. Shugart and Waggoner examine these women as producers of "logics and rhetorics of resistance," especially as their oeuvres relate to and challenge traditional conceptions of heteronormative desire, sexual power, and gendered identity (5). Not limited to camp in particular, this study focuses on how West, through irony, parody, and audience cooptation, creates a rhetorical character space that (in)directly confronts and complicates what A. Cronin refers to as female "compulsory individuality" (277), which exists as both a "right and a duty" for women who are "paradoxically produced through interpretive choice and a redoubling of the terms of women's ... exclusion from the social, cultural and epistemological status of 'the individual'" (285). West's rhetorical character space effects a kind of explosion of individuality into a vacuum of desire: the audience's, the character's, her own. She desires and is desired, but beyond lust, beyond the carnal exuberance of coitus and the pursuit of its objects (men), West's characters are always rhetorically empty, living and dying in the repetitive act of *jouissance* over and over again. Simply put, in this *rhetorical character space*, West's identity is

never identical with itself, is never selfsame, never rooted in place and time, never fleshed out with any but the meanest biographical detail. It provides a viewing experience of seeing something/someone fully open but without content, exposed but not naked. She is a metonym for desire, linked to her particular dramatic situations only by contiguity. Exploding individuality, West's entire strategy of rhetorical indirection is rightfully characterizable as feminist because its resistive, transgressive, and subversive performances challenge traditional notions of gender-power (Shugart and Waggoner 7) and because, according to Keith Miller, it "valorizes puzzles," "prompts laughter," and "assails" rigid structures of knowing and being by "circling, bouncing" (71). Like Anita Loos's work for Douglas Fairbanks, West reverses and metaphorizes the space of gender performance in her writing, creating "male characters that serve as props to enhance her stage appearance"; these men, formerly so powerful, become "'suckers' who fall prey to their own egos" (Ward 11). In the end, West becomes her own leading man.³⁸

West borrows, perhaps exemplifies, Michelle Ballif's book's moniker, becoming the woman with (or, better, *woman as*) the rhetorical figure. She exists in body, gesture, and language but is irreducible to any of them, and her subversions of sex, gender, and power remain unique puzzles of rhetorical history and method, puzzles in need of some attempt at solution – which, admittedly, will never fully come. Mae West's rhetoric invites, indeed demands, a close analysis of her methods and manners of expression, not to mention her motives and ends (McQuarrie and Mick 424). Any work in this direction, though, is necessarily (and joyfully)

³⁸ This becomes more and more true for West as her career progresses. She often took credit for "discovering" Cary Grant (who had, by the time of her initial work with him in the early 1930s, appeared in several films). West worked with Grant twice in 1933 for Paramount, in *I'm No Angel* and *She Done Him Wrong*. The latter film resulted in huge box office and an Academy Award nomination for Best Picture. West often bragged that *She Done Him Wrong* singlehandedly saved Paramount from bankruptcy. As West's star rose, her desire to take all a film's laughs became known, and most A-list leading men in Hollywood avoided her.

complicated by “West’s insistence on merging her public and private persona[s] into an inseparable entity” (Ward ix). As Carol Ward explains,

Since irony was her mode of communication and theatrical artifice was her method of presentation of that irony, West’s true personality is difficult to perceive through the layers of façade. Like the glittering diamonds with which she adorned herself, West seems all surface and no substance. ... Because of all this deliberate obfuscation, the ultimate “truth” about West’s life may never be known. We have to settle for the many little truths that together form a composite portrait of this amazingly complex or extraordinarily simple woman. (ix-x)

Considering West as a rhetorical figure becomes particularly useful when one works from the definition of a rhetorical figure as “an artful deviation” from propositional norms, a deviation meant to draw attention to its status and technique as a performative gesture (McQuarrie and Mick 425), a definition largely agreed upon by leading theorists for most of the twentieth century, from Jakobson and Halle in 1956, to Burke in 1950, to Leech in 1960, to Corbett in 1968. West’s character and performances consist of her palimpsestic violations of norms and meanings, her multiple, vertical deviations “from expectation” at “the level of form rather than content” as well as her continuing subversion of that very distinction (425).

West’s expertise at manipulations of form defined her character and her public perception from the beginning. In his 1934 portrait *Face of Mae West Which Can Be Used as An Apartment*, Salvador Dali appropriates West’s visage in a most appropriately critical way: Dali spatialized his subject and conflated, exactly as West herself did, the difference between her internal and external elements (though he does imbed an important, shadowy line to her mouth – the line cuts through the painting if as to indicate the importance of her voice, her words, in the

complication of inner and outer worlds), a key component of her ongoing destabilization of traditional western notions of gendered, not to mention humanist identity.

Figure 1. Salvador Dali's *Face of Mae West Which Can Be Used as An Apartment*, (1934).

Dali's portrait of West is an important framing element for this study, one that allows West to be considered as, herself, a rhetorical figure, a figure that exists both in language and space, *an ekphrastic figure*. *Ekphrasis*, as W.J.T. Mitchell reminds us, began as a little-known ancient Greek literary genre of poems that describe works of visual art but has become more generally useful to scholars of both classical and modern by focusing on a central problem: "the verbal representation of visual representation" (152). *Ekphrasis* functions in this analysis of Mae West as that space of transference between her body-as-spectacle and her language as both indicative of and contained within that body-as-spectacle, allowing her to operate, as I will explain, exadversively, inside and outside the diagetic lines around which other "characters" (but not the West character) would be constrained. Westian *ekphrasis* functions not only to describe but, more often and more subversively, to characterize a particular space of Westian indirection. As we will see in Dali's *Visage*, Mae West's spatialized rhetoric, her *ekphrastic excess* creates what Simon Goldhill calls in his description of *ekphrastic* epigrams in classical Greece, "a critical gaze" that "is committed to a value-laden view of things," not purely a description, which "creates and regulates the viewing subject – both by a selection of what to look at and how to look," setting up the reader/viewer for a "discrete, pointed, witty surprise" (2).

In his introduction to John Tusk's *The Complete Films of Mae West*, Parker Tyler describes the Dali piece nicely.

Dali doubtless used a photograph for its basis and what he did was to interpret her face, seen frontally in a familiar expression, in terms of a rather grand room on two levels. Instantly recognizing her, one perceives her chin defined by four rounding steps leading to the second, or main, level of the “room.” Her lips, just as neatly illusioned, are a sumptuous violent-red sofa, her nose (only its blunt uplifted tip and wide nostrils visible) a fireplace against a solid red wall opposite us, and her eyes two gold-framed pictures made to look like dark cityscapes as much as eyes. Two jeweled pendants serve as realistic earrings while divided, voluptuously billowing drapes (making a stagelike proscenium for the “room”) constitute a marvelous illusion of Mae’s wavy, white-blond hair. Strangely, the red wall serves as a sort of half-mask, but this seems to add to, rather than detract from, the utter conviction of this portrait. (9)

Like Dali’s portrait, the West character mastered the double-negative of the fluid and dynamic inversion of the internal and external worlds, her specific *ekphrastic* function, which she poses (and Dali here, in her stead, poses) as a radical subversion of traditional feminine closedness, silence, and opacity. First, the spaciousness of West’s persona is demonstrated as an entity divided by multiple dyads: her body and head break off into two rooms, one elevated and emphasized, her headspace clearly represented as the purpose of the painting. The room’s division as well as the heavy-hanging, platinum curls/curtains on each side of West’s head suggest that this particular room is not just a living space but, as Tyler suggests, a stage, a performative space as well, again challenging the traditional dichotomy between the interior and exterior of the self, the stage and the audience. The top room is divided again within itself between the skin-tones of the floor and West’s red mask, suggesting that within the performative

space West carves out yet another division. We are invited to rest on West's lips and peer into the street-scenes that are her eyes, a final challenge invited by West and posed by Dali to the traditionally idealized woman, one who, as Cheryl Glenn explains, "has been disciplined by cultural codes that require a closed mouth (silence), a closed body (chastity), and an enclosed life (domestic confinement)" (*Rhetoric Retold* 1). Based on the metaphor of West-as-space, Dali attempts to approach not just the content of West's sexual subversiveness but also her own continued performance approach of juxtaposing opposites, her own status as a living figure of speech who "is tied up with the topic of dissimilarity" (Corbett 426). Here, West's very persona not only brings her stage with her but remains, while upon that stage, half hidden, half exposed.³⁹

Rhetorically, Dali's assessment of West through spatial metaphor provides a foundation for this analysis, which attempts to present West as an even more encompassing, more complex feminist rhetorical figure. Spatial metaphor, of course, derives from the semantic-figural category that also includes antithesis, conciliation, gradation, hyperbole, synecdoche, and metonymy (Bonsiepe 38). In my view, though, West's central rhetorical figure moves beyond metaphor to yet another figure, one that Gui Bonsiepe calls "exadversion," or "assertion by a double negative" (38).⁴⁰ Westian exadversion remains fixed to and dependent upon spatial metaphor, but the metaphor in question becomes the inside and outside of a film or play's

³⁹ The question of West's actual shallowness seems to be indirectly refuted by her ability at once to be uniquely popular with mass audiences (in the 1930s she bragged of being the second highest earner in the country, after W.R. Hearst) *as well as being* hugely threatening to traditional standards of "decency." It is well known that West "served as a primary motivation for increased industry self-regulation after 1934" (Curry, "Censored" 57). Rhetorically speaking, West's work focuses on the subversive creation of spaces of identification (hence her enormous threat to "the moral tenor of movies" (Curry, "Censored" 57).

⁴⁰ In West's case, exadversion as a semantic exadversion is a pragmatic figure based on her character's extra-diegetic commentary. In a Brechtian way, almost, West asserts the double-negative of a character commenting on the constructedness of that character's situation *as well* as that character commenting on the nature of the author of that construction. It functions as a double-negative, then, in its violation of diegetic norms: the character of the biographical West asserts itself through the filmic West's own extra-diegetic moves; the "real" West (also a character, of course) becomes defined as that which comments upon the artificial nature of the "characterized" West's situation.

diegesis,⁴¹ a narrative work of art's internal sense of space-time. The simplest way to explain West's exadversion comes in her extra-diegetical asides, a commonplace of any Westian film or play ("Is that a pistol in your pocket, or are you pleased to see me?"). These quips, usually of a sexual nature, are redirected back onto West's status as a real-life character. Consequently, then, Westian exadversion does not occur on the sentence-level; it only exists on the boundaries of the film-space and bases itself upon the violation of the diegetical membrane. In so doing, West's exadversion also functions as a particular type of rhetorical indirection able to be wielded only within the parameters of celebrity.

In West's case, exadversion typically draws from other members of the tropological-figural category, particularly metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and antithesis. Very importantly, exadversion in West's case operates on the lexical level, the gestural level, and the performative level. Additionally, West's exadversion almost always draws from metaphor and metonymy. For her, the appropriation of multiple, often juxtaposed meanings works far above the textual level (though it works there, too). As Hayden White reminds us, it is this type of study, "the study of the figurative element" in a given moment or discourse, like the one Mae West offers, that "permits us to characterize the instrumental, pragmatic, or conative dimensions" of a given rhetorical act or text (105). Any study of Westian rhetoric has to come to grips with her with constant rejection of denotation, her implicit acknowledgement that, as Michael Bernard-Donals explains, all history, indeed, all truth, derives not from the structure of the history or truth but from the figures ("metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony") out of which "history itself originates" (419). Reading West through this lens, a lens also inspired by Burke's theory of synecdoche in *Grammar of Motives*, her absence of self is similar to "the

⁴¹ The diegesis includes objects, events, spaces and the characters that inhabit them, including things, actions, and attitudes not explicitly presented in the film but inferred by the audience. That audience constructs a diegetic world from the material presented in a narrative film.

absence of the event, the whole,” which places “its emphasis on the chain of associations among the various parts *without reference to* whatever event or object we might think of as ‘anchoring’ the chain of associations” (Bernard-Donals 420). Westian exadversion asserts self by its removal, and in the process of *ex adversio* it undermines patriarchal power, a power rooted deep in Western ways of knowing.

Hence, West’s work has larger, philosophical implications as well as implications for the history and politics of gender. Her exadversive, extradiagetical figurations challenge the very structures of Western humanist identity-making, including its most fundamental proposition: I = I, for which she substitutes her ironic, confounding, and oft-repeated dictum “Mae West is always Mae West” (Ward ix).⁴² Here she exists on both sides of equivalency, exactly *what* or *who* she is remains unclear and most certainly dynamic. West alters the semantic possibility of the selfsame, humanist individual, creating a particular and important space for rhetorical, historical, and cultural analysis. Traditional subjectivity, Michelle Ballif argues,

(which has been historically constructed in terms of a phallic logic of noncontradiction, presence, and selfsame identity) has effectively (and yet dubiously) privileged – economically, politically, and rhetorically – a particular few, while effectively marginalizing all others. (6)

Following Ballif’s lead, I present Mae West as a radical challenge to that phallogocentric history of “stable, self-identical, self-representing subject[s],” a reminder that it represents “a powerful fantasy of the Enlightenment – a fantasy prefaced by Parmenides and Plato” (Ballif 7). Not one to let the limits of self be defined by others, true or not, West teased in 1934, “I have given six life-stories, but I can always give one more” (Ward 103).

⁴² With this sleight of hand, West transforms the very act of identity into a performance.

West's appropriation of these semantic structures runs through her characterization and indeed her self-view, and its roots exist in a deep, metonymic chain of substitutions: substitutions of language for sex, of innuendo for forceful persuasion, of indirection for propositionality, of telling for showing, of wealth for poverty, of substance for sheen. West's storied sex appeal nearly never comes from the show of skin or actual seduction, and her storied immorality covers over a relatively tame and mundane personal and social life. Though she did court perhaps hundreds of male lovers, West rarely drank nor did drugs, and the limits of her Hollywood debauchery extended, largely, to her great love of sweets.

Sugar, though, was not the only thing Mae West coveted: she was enamored early on with jewelry as well. In her first attempt at writing, a short play entitled *The Ruby Ring*, West demonstrates this desire *as well* as an early example of her rhetorical figuration of the reversals of outside and inside, reversals that remain challenging to western cultural notions of identity.

The Ruby Ring, West biographer Jill Watts reveals,

took place at a grand ball where the enchanting Gloria (West's role) instructs two female friends on the art of flirtation. Gloria bets her bracelet against a ruby ring that she can get five men to propose to her, each in less than five minutes. By assuming a different personality tailored to the unique qualities of each man, Gloria successfully seduces a college boy, businessman, rich elderly gentleman, cowboy, and psychology professor. All return at the same moment to whisk her to the altar but discover that Gloria has duped them. Not only has she accepted proposals from all of them, but she is already married. She collects on her bet and, as the skit closes, remarks to her unwitting husband, "Look dear – how do you like my new ruby ring?" ... [This play] allowed West to channel her

tricksterism by adopting the role of a shapeshifter. For Gloria's collegiate beau, she became a well-read society maiden. To the powerful businessman, she appeared as a devotee of "pep" and "ambition." She insisted on her fondness for gingham to the cowboy, and her youthful innocence bewitched the wealthy older man. In the end, she transformed into a deadly temptress to ensnare the bookish psychology professor. (57-58)

West's work in *The Ruby Ring* represents her first serious attempt at writing and entry into the adult phase of her career, a phase marked by West's growing interest in "wordplay." Gloria's masquerades all rest on conversation; "she makes no costume changes" (59). The strategies represented here, though, go beyond mere wordplay and denote the kind of rhetorical figuration that West will spend the rest of her career developing. In each of the cases of seduction, West creates in, on, and around her own body and mind an idealized space in which each potential suitor can exist. Her body and voice are relieved of any of their specific connections to local conditions or exigencies. Rather, she becomes (a body-in-space) spatialized rhetoric, a resting place and feedback loop for male desire, an energy-generator appropriating male power by undermining the desiring mechanism and the social mores that make the pursuit of women-as-objects permissible.

Where my analysis diverges from Watts's, though, comes in my assertion of the ethical quality of West's reversals. West attains to – though perhaps she does not fully achieve here, especially in this earliest written venture – an ethics of irony and reversal. Irony as an ethical device plays a significant role in Kenneth Burke's "Four Master Tropes," an appendix to his 1969 work *A Grammar of Motives* insofar as it trumps the others. As Jeffrey W. Murray explains,

Irony is *dialogical*. Whereas metaphor, metonymy, and synecdoche offer particular perspectives for viewing and knowing the world, irony offers a “perspective of perspectives” (1969a, 512). Ultimately irony depends upon the perspectives of Others – of other symbol users – *and is thus an explicitly dialogical rather than rhetorical trope*. Moreover, this inclusion of the voices of Others in the construction of “truth” distinguishes irony as *ethical*. Irony may, in fact, offer the clearest view of Burke’s own incipient theory of ethics ... [as well as] a tacit synthesis of his dramatistic accounts of epistemology, ontology, and ethics. (22)

As Murray points out, irony becomes ethical for Burke because in its dialogism it not only recognizes the intractable presence of Others, but it incorporates not just the fact of the Other but the very point of view of the Other into its own perspective. Irony, then, trumps the other master tropes in its multi-perspectival lens, and it links – through dramatism – the ways we know things with what we know as well as how we should approach both subjects. The negotiation of the intractable Other fomented in ironic discourse, particularly discourse like that produced by the character Mae West, a kind multi-layered meaning-machine, where each cog functions across semiotic, semantic, and somatic dimensions and where the final products of this machine remain open to interpretation, restructuring, and continual renegotiation. For Mae West, irony provides the cheap joke *as well* as an ontological critique. She, as a creator of rhetorical space and a progenitor of indirectly gendered critique, lies somewhere in the middle of those poles, between the onscreen West and her extradiagetical self.

Mae West is never caught “laying bare the truth, the truth of one’s sexuality, and inscribing it within a particular narrative” (Ballif 143). In fact, the very rhetorical character of

West's technique tends toward the opposite of what Michelle Ballif calls the orgiastic *production* of truth: *seduction*. West's seduction begins with her variously-signifying occupation of feminine space, which, according to Ballif (and Baudrillard)

is not a representation of gender, sex, or sexuality. It is not a "marked" term; and it would certainly not lay claim to any truth of its own, specifically a sexual truth. The feminine does not exist in "nature" ... but, rather, exists (if it can be said that is) in the space of simulation, artifice (Baudrillard, *Seduction* 2, 11). The feminine is nothing, Gorgias's *apatē*, but, this is her strength, just as it is *apatē*'s strength to answer to *kairos* and disrupt the dialectic stronghold (Baudrillard, *Seduction* 14). (Ballif 144)

The feminine as it remains embodied and performed by Mae West "is not a gender; it is a challenge, a challenge to the comfortable binaries which sustain truth, a challenge to our social, gender coding" (Ballif 145).

The seduction to which Ballif alludes, one she borrows from Baudrillard, is a process of designification, one that challenges the very notion and production of truth, and in this manner remains somewhat tied to Judith Butler's theory of performativity. For Butler, though, the performance of gender in drag, particularly, indicates the very instability and performed-nature of gender's (previously considered) ontological status. The only difference between Butler and Baudrillard/Ballif here is that the latter sees seduction as dissolving the very ontological strictures that hold *all truth* together – not just the "truth" of gender. The difference between Butler's critique and that of Baudrillard/Ballif, here, is not a question of differing content; rather, it is a question of scope. "This," Ballif argues, "is where epistemology has failed us" (145). It has "produced knowledge and, by extension, has produced us as subjects, insofar as we strip the

veils of appearance, of style, of illusion, in order to reveal the truth,” a dire mistake as the spectacle, as discussed in previous chapters, it itself tautologically true (146).

As a philosophical/rhetorical harbinger of the performative, public selves that emerge in the twentieth century, West compares nicely with Ballif’s prototype of Western female ambivalence, a master of multiple veils: Helen. Like West, “[w]e have,” Ballif explains, “no desire to vindicate her as object of desire” (146).

To do so would be to assume the woman-as-victim subject position, a popular position but, nevertheless, a reactive one. Further, we have no desire to vindicate her as subject of desire. To do so would be to assume the woman-as-humanist subject position, an ethical dead end. (146)

As seen in Dali’s portrait of West as Baudrillard explains, “[t]here is no active or passive mode in seduction, no subject or object, no interior or exterior; seduction plays on both sides, and there is no frontier separating them. One cannot seduce others, if one has not oneself been seduced” (qtd in Ballif 147).

Mae West as a rhetorical figure, then, asserts the will to seduce *and* be seduced, and she operates on the levels of overt *and* covert seduction, a seduction that opens the spaces necessary for questioning the seemingly inert power structures behind and within gender; her covert seduction is a critical seduction. Overt seduction, however, her seemingly insatiable appetite for men (boxers, athletes, bodybuilders, actors – all young, handsome, muscled) has been interpreted in several different ways (generally negative ones) by those around her. Musgrove and Eells spend a great deal of time in their rendering of West’s sexual narcissism and “unrelenting vanity” (19) pointing to her mirrored-ceiling and the seemingly countless backs of perfect men she avoids seeing as she gazes into her own eyes. When confronted with the notion that her

mirror-fixation made her a sexual narcissist, she claimed, simply, “I like to see how I’m doin’” (131). In director Henry Hathaway’s notion, though, “lovers” did not represent “the peak of Mae’s aspirations” (Eells and Musgrove 163).

“Power. That’s what interested her,” he observed. “The power she got from making a picture was more important even than money. Her requirements demanded that she have authority, not material things. She never needed a Rolls-Royce [though she had at least one]. She never bought an elaborate estate or a Beverly Hills mansion. She had a modest house in the Valley and a fairly big place at the beach – in Santa Monica, not Malibu Colony. But think about where she spent most of her time – in that little apartment [the one with the mirrored bedroom ceiling] on Rossmore. And she liked it there because that was a place where she could create the illusion of being in complete control. (Eells and Musgrove 163)

Indeed, the star’s self-met-gaze, her reflected communion with her own coital body through the mirror, contained much more than sexual narcissism (though, I do agree that it was sprinkled with it): perhaps West holds herself in her own gaze in this moment as a way to remain a witness to her radical existence, her radical subversion of the truths of production, her “revolutionary critique without a revolutionary subject” (Ballif 151). Ballif explains eloquently that such encounters, such moments of rhetorical complexity offer us “a pathos of distance, that is, the feminine that is the ‘irony of the community’” (151). West’s pursuit of power as well as her pursuit of her own captured image represent evidence of her particular struggles. Indeed, West was not so much interested in the accuracy of her reflected self, as evidenced by the fact that the

mirror in her apartment's entryway was "slightly curved," and "produced the illusion of added height and reduced weight" (Eells and Musgrove 131).

The feminine as embodied seduction exadversively embodies what Burke pushes toward in his Appendix on master tropes: Mae West's performance of rhetorical (and, indeed, ontological) indirection is ethical in its interrogation of gender's constraining assumptions, its limits and its overt rejection of traditional modes of policing those boundaries; it is the performance as well as the release of the dialogue with the intractable other, an other that exists, though not in the realm of production (which, of course, is a radical shift away from Burke's more modern approach to ethics and dialogics). West's rhetorical figuring invites us to "radically rethink the conception of 'liberty' and 'empowerment'" as well as its antecedents: identity, self-production, and linguistic reference. In this way and at this time, West is better known as a radical philosopher of rhetoric than a camp performer, though camp certainly falls softly under the purview of this study. Camp alone, though, does not provide us with the realization of "new, ethical ways of being – beyond the dialectic, beyond production and representation"; for that, "our epistemology must be seduced" (Ballif 151).

Virgin to Vamp: Childhood Trauma and Early Performance Modalities

As an adult, Mae West often retold the story of the loss of her virginity as a defining moment in her girlhood. Already a seasoned performer in her native Brooklyn, little, blond, outspoken Mamie West, originally Mary Jane West, enjoyed being tutored rather than attending school regularly. This approach, thought her devoted and adoring mother, Tillie, prevented her education from interfering with performance schedules, which, even at that early age tended toward recurring monthly highlights in amateur contests with constant rehearsals and late-night rendezvous with rowdy New Yorkers hungry for laughter, song, and a little Rabelaisian humor

after a hard day's work. West's tutor was a young, handsome and, as she tells it, naïve scholar in his twenties who never receives a name, even as his mythic status grows through West's innumerable retellings. Walking home from the theater after one day's lesson, the story goes, West pinned her tutor down on the steps leading up to the family's brownstone and, under the cover of her large, fur coat, rather forced the teacher to make love to her. As West often explained, as her interest in sex increased, she became more and more drawn to the notion of experimentation before she was menstruating (according to all accounts, West's earliest sexual experiences probably occurred when she was 11 or 12), before, she wistfully recalled, sex had consequences. This version of the story was not the whole truth; it was, in fact, according to former agent and biographer Stanley Musgrove, reworked "for public consumption" (25). Here, he alludes obliquely to West's more private tale of her first time being with "a handsome ex-actor who had no idea of her true age, only her assurance about her previous experience. He guessed the truth only when she bled profusely" (25).

West's renegotiation of her traumatic early encounters defines her career, saturates her very character. "[A]fter the first couple of times," Musgrove recalled West explaining in a fashion exemplary of her reclaiming her memory, her dignity, and her body, that after a few times "it felt good" (25). She continued, "I wanted to find what all this sex stuff was about without any risk" (24). Watts disagrees,

Despite her later insistence that she was the aggressor in these affairs, she also indicated that she felt exploited. She related her earliest sexual encounters dispassionately, with a curious detachment that would always mark her attitude toward intimacy. This ambivalence reflected the reality that Mae West's first exposure to sex was traumatic; she was a victim of what now would be

recognized as child molestation. In each case, adult men used her for gratification. (24)⁴³

In some real ways, it is reasonable to read West's entire career as a kind of public renegotiation of her early victimhood, a kind of discursive and performative rebellion against it and/or a disassociation from it. Helpfully, as Janice Haaken reminds us, much work has been done in clinical psychology in the past decades that focuses specifically on "sexual abuse survivors who do not recognize the imprint of their abuse experiences" (116). This group, whose symptoms actually work to conceal and dissociate their earlier trauma, seems to include Mae West. Sometimes, Haaken explains, these types of reenactments are also means of forgetting and the revising of contexts and scenarios in which power was lost. However West seems to control sex and its vestigial scars, it remains a defining rhetorical *topos* for her.

Mae West's indirect feminist rhetoric starts with and turns on her constant reenactment of the power dynamics of sex and gender as a negotiation of early trauma. In these reenactments, West forwards what Jeffrey W. Murray sees as a Burkean ethics of irony, a constant and fluid renegotiation of the very fact of what Burke called the intractable other, a recalcitrant, and in her case, abusive, other. Here, she struggles with the other's point of view as both a tributary of her own celebrity persona and performance style as well as the impossibility of its forgetting.⁴⁴ It is a rhetoric unique to its moment in the emergent, early twentieth century spectacular media of stage and screen that challenges and topples traditional notions of women's gender-power and attempts to overtly divide its audience into those potentially activated by this message and those

⁴³ Of course, these assertions have to be tempered by West's own attempts to claim ownership, even control, of these instances of abuse and trauma. Her pursuit of sexual power over strong men (boxers, etc.) serves as at least indirect evidence of a recurring renegotiation of these traumas.

⁴⁴ As Murray argues, "[R]ecalcitrance and irony offer an initial discussion of the way in which Others, those with whom we are not already co-constituted, present themselves to us within language. If we operate understanding Burke's assumption of consubstantiality, we are sometimes met with the recalcitrance of the Other. That recalcitrance is experienced as irony, as a clash of motives and constitutions" (34), a perspective that integrates the perspectives of others. This is why, for Burke, of all the master tropes irony remains the most ethically important.

whose lack of awareness provides support for the humor of the enterprise by drawing the rhetor's subtle critique. Mae West's hyper-sexualized feminine persona works toward her feminism in the same complicated way the theater (a seemingly bourgeois institution) worked for Brecht's Marxism: it presents itself as a "commodity pertaining to the very logic it denounces," at once deploying radical critique and redirecting that critique ironically back upon itself and the audience who enjoys it (30). This double-implication of audience and self is the touchstone of Westian indirect rhetoric, but though it remains powerful, it also, especially in analysis, remains fragile as well. It remains for the scholar, of course, rather difficult sometimes to write directly about indirection.⁴⁵

Sex without consequences/inconsequential sex became a kind of mantra for the Mae West character, even in its incipency. The biographical West, though, at least while still in her youth, had not been completely subsumed by the persona and remained caught in a kind of intimacy-dance in which she could only ever simulate connection by conjuring the sex act itself in what would become a seemingly endless cycle of sexual-narcissism-as-echolocation, a process Musgrove and biographer George Eells explain as exemplified in West's preferred coping ritual: she would, as her career progressed, often only be consoled when upset by images of herself. Musgrove recollected several times that he had a box of publicity stills ready for her "approval" just for such an occasion as she might feel depressed. Indeed, West's image was not just important to her, but part of her radical subtlety/psychological fragility came in her constant need to be reminded through her image that she was real. In the end, sex became for West and the

⁴⁵ We do know, though, that all indirection is context and medium specific and depends, largely, on isolating, as much as one possibly can, motives of rhetors. This, of course, is dicey at times, but it is also why the framing of indirect rhetorics of all sorts should be conveyed as interpretive on the part of the scholar, never definitive. Indirection as a rhetorical motif is powerful, but it should not be deployed as a critical-rhetorical strategy that condones the unitary truth of a situation because to rely on traditional notions of the possibilities of Cartesian self-knowledge works against the very overdetermined nature of human selves, situations, and motives. Indirect rhetoric can only contribute to larger discussions as one voice in many and should not be deployed as a totalizing device.

West character a kind of reenactment of forgetting, perhaps even a retributive operation of psychological vengeance against the real intimacy and agency that had been stolen from the performer as a young girl.

Biographical evidence, as well, points to another kind of abuse West encountered early on in the person of her father, Battlin' Jack West, an ill-tempered, streetwise Irishman, whose physique was reinvested in the star's post-menopausal performances in Las Vegas, her cadre of bodybuilders enacting in reverse the straw man of her youth, perhaps best embodied in the person of her later caretaker, bodybuilder Paul Novak. The extent and the nature of her abusive relationship with her father is unclear, but West remembered often cowering in corners out of terror, afraid that her father's temper would turn her way. An amateur pugilist, Jack West taught his small daughter "the manly arts of boxing, acrobatics, and weightlifting," Watts recalls, noting that Jack West "immersed her in his world of physical brutality, taking her to the gym and to prizefights" (11). West's early relationship with violence and power, though, went much deeper: "Mae remembered battling her father in one-on-one boxing matches. Pitting a grown man, a trained boxer, against a small child was not mere play," Watts argues, but "was abusive. The relationship between violence and power consumed Mae West as an adult, and she often associated it with her father" (11).

In another often told story, one in which the typical Westian humor and double-voicedness are absent, West reminisced about her first sexual dream, at the age of 12; a huge bear with an erect, "reddish-brown penis" enters her room on its hind legs, places his paws over her headboard and proceeds to sexually penetrate her as she lay pinned beneath (Eells and Musgrove 24). As Watts reveals, West once shared with a close colleague that the bear dream "worried me for a long time" and that, as an adult, "she was plagued by such intense dreams

about sex that she required sedatives so she could sleep” (24). “But *why* a bear,” West later quipped in her typical offhand manner, “I was never interested in them” (Eells and Musgrove 24). In a nod to her 1932 film, *I’m No Angel*, she continues, “Lions were what I found fas-cin-a-tin” (24).

Mae West lives with her head in the lion’s mouth, as does her character Tira in *Angel*, and her indirect feminist rhetoric is rhetorically responsive to her troubling, confining, and sometimes sexually violent earlier relationships. Though sold as the great conquistadora of sex, the great purveyor of innuendo, Mae West and her *actual* bodily relationship with sex and men suggests a continued negotiation with and fight against her own sense of confinement and insecurity. Mae West’s indirect feminist rhetoric, then, represents an embodied technology of performance not dissimilar from her principal and earliest influence, Bert Williams.

Egbert Austin Williams (1874-1922) dominated vaudeville in the early part of the twentieth century with his ebullient singing and dancing, becoming what biographer Eric Ledell Smith called “the leading comedian of his time,” eventually starring as the first black performer in the Ziegfeld Follies (qtd in Forbes 603). Another aspect of his show, though, the one that shot through young Mae West like a barbed spike, came in Williams’s donning of blackface, a double masking of his already African American identity and an early attempt at the kind of extradiegetical commentary West would later perfect. While some viewed Williams’s performance as submissive to white stereotypes of African Americans, others, particularly African Americans in the crowd – though often separated off from the rest of the audience by strict spatial partitioning – saw in Williams’s comedy themes that subtly mocked the white audience and implicated them in their racist gaze, what James Weldon Johnson called, in a meditation on Williams in the *American Mercury* in 1928, the challenge of a writer “not to

address a double audience, but a divided one” (Forbes 606). Already by 1921, the year the young Mae West would dye her locks white-blond, she was being reviewed favorably as fronting her own doubleness, as engendered by her early love and appropriation of Williams. Watts explains that “Mae was dangerous [to the critics]; by playing between extremes ... she made her performance subversive and disquieting” (57). At this phase in the late teens and early twenties, with West known primarily for her alluring dance, “the shimmy,” the performer existed less between the boundaries of male and female and more along the electric line between the races as publicly performed in 1920s New York.

Although Williams’s work had a deep impact on what would become Mae West’s gender performance, some Harlem Renaissance intelligentsia and later generations of African American scholars, critics, and writers would feel less inclined to elevate Williams as a pioneer, as his blackface-upon-African American identity performance tilted perilously on the very edge of American racism *and* its public critique. Even Ralph Ellison, whose wily grandfather in *Invisible Man*, tells his grandson, whispering, in his dying breath to, “Live with your head in the lion’s mouth let ‘em swoller you till they vomit or bust wide open” (16), dismisses Williams’s work. In *Shadow and Act*, Ellison explains that actors like Williams who “assume the group-debasing role for gain not only substantiates the audience’s belief in the ‘blackness’ of all things black, but relieves it, with dream-like efficiency, of its guilt” (49). Ellison’s consideration of Williams’s work fails to take into account, though, a facet of the Williams-performative that inculcates the audience, appropriates it, toward critical ends.⁴⁶ As Michelle Ann Stephens argues,

⁴⁶ Though perhaps an inspiration for Ellison’s Clifton character in *Invisible Man*, Williams, at least in this reading, uses his performance to critical ends. Clifton, of course, signifies his own hopelessness by returning to the streets in a highly disconcerting blackface-puppet act. Certainly Ellison’s interpretation here is of great importance and should remain a caveat to my interpretation.

Williams's story involves two people – the man to whom the trouble occurs and the person witnessing and laughing at the event. When shared as a joke to a third person, all the players in the scene shift to a more social level of interaction, as Freud described in *Jokes and Their Relationship to the Unconscious*, published in 1905 and contemporaneous with Williams' ... first musical comedies. Freud argued that this third person, the one 'to whom the comic thing is told', was 'indispensable for the completion' of a successful joke (Freud, 1963: 224). The success of a joke rests in part on the forming of a crucial alliance between performer and audience, the first and third person, who together feel comfortable creating a sense of community from their shared laughter at a suitable, second other. (136)

The traditional rendering of Williams's minstrelsy, though, fails to articulate or notice a level of critical potential that brews between and among the audience and the performer in the moment of shared community. It is in this very moment where a kind of tenuous identification is built that subversive social critique can be drawn – though not too sharply.

This moment in Bert Williams's constructions of race and later in Mae West's constructions of gender is elided by the performers' desire for wealth, fame, and adulation, but this elision – as well as one that comes in the very anesthetic of the performed identity-as-drawn – creates space for radical subversion. Williams, as he recalls in his 1918 essay "The Comic Side of Trouble," is anything but immune to racism. He explains, "I have acquired enough philosophy to protect me against the things which could cause me humiliation and grief had I not learned independence" (par. 5). Some critics, like Karen Sotiropoulos, have drawn attention to moments in Williams's performances when "black audiences in the balcony laughed ... [and]

whites remained silent. These moments made all too clear that [Williams] told jokes that went literally and figuratively over the heads of their white audiences” (Sotiropoulos 6). In his transforming of the space of performance into the space of critique, Williams at the dawn of the age of mass communication, an age West would come for some time to dominate, successfully appropriated and then co-opted an audience. Stephens explains what made Bert Williams a radical character was that the “joke was precisely that of his racialization *as* the figure of social ridicule” (136).

While Ellison, perhaps rightfully, felt uncomfortable with Williams’s performances because, as he thought, they enacted white audiences “own form of racial forgetting,” these critiques miss the radical potential inherent in Williams’s approach. First, Williams was able to both attain a diverse audience (which, for any African American entertainer of that period, was difficult to do) *and* subvert that audience, while still maintaining enough performative gravity (or “entertainment value”) to keep the audiences in their seats. The entertainment value of Williams’s work is, to my thinking, both the element that made Ellison so uncomfortable but also the necessary condition for the comedian’s larger, subversive agenda. Camille Forbes is correct, then, to “consider his interventions not in simple terms of accommodation or radical resistance, but rather in terms of racial performativity, informed by Judith Butler’s work on gender performativity” (608). What makes Forbes’s take on Williams-though-Butler interesting for this study is that long before Butler theorized drag as an ontologically subversive activity, Mae West had become, appropriating Williams’s technique (as well as his claim to the soothing balm of humor), the most famous female impersonator in the world, according to a 1934 *Vanity Fair* editorial. Reading Williams through Butler has a particularly delicious presentist disregard for the sequences of history as well as representing the kind of zealous appropriation that Mae

West would have loved. Williams's tendency to disrupt the frenetic pace of the vaudeville stage, his propensity to talk-sing, and the appearance that he "hardly endeavored to make his audiences laugh, perhaps hardly cared whether they did nor not" had an enormous effect on the young West, and she appropriated each one of them, as they helped her create a kind of performative camouflage. But, as Jill Watts argues, Williams' presence in her life and performance "went beyond her surface delivery and permeated the substance of her performance, providing the sustaining subtext for it" (23) – a subtext of radically unstable meanings, of publicity-as-personal-negotiation of trauma, of the audience as surrogate lover, surrogate friend. Most of all, though, what West draws from Williams is the notion of a carefully crafted and often dangerous public self, sometimes, in the performative shadow of the already sly Williams, who, as a young girl, she would channel and imitate at "church socials" as, what her stage-mother Tillie often called, "the beginning of *her training*" (Ward 108).

Subverting Inversion: *SEX*, *The Drag*, and *The Pleasure Man*

In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler takes issue with Monique Wittig's "oppositional relationship" to Freud, foregrounding "the function of language in which 'the mark of gender' occurs" (Butler 27). Wittig's rejection of what she sees as Freud's heteronormativity in his *Three Essays on Sexuality* is understandable, but Butler correctly warns her readers that despite that shortcoming, psychoanalysis provides some useful framework for understanding the modern agent, even a modern agent that practices sexual subversion.

Following Lacan and Irigaray, Butler reveals that, traditionally, the feminine throughout psychoanalytic theory has been represented as "lack"; said differently, "the feminine is never a mark of the subject" (27). This lack, though, functions as other in a system of othering, where even the male symbolic apparatus is "produced by the law that prohibits incest and forces an

infinite displacement of a heterosexualizing desire,” which, in any case, is just as absent as the lack in an ontological sense, though its presence is marked in the tides of publicness and public acceptability (27). This public propositionality is the mark of traditional rhetoric, whose conceit lies in the assumption of its fairness and open access. This element of Irigary’s Freud is exceptionally important for Butler’s theorization of the subject in her famous account of subversive sexual performance, or drag. For Butler, drag represents a public and corporealized critique of the assumption of binaristic ontologies of gender. Of course, Irigary’s decision to extrapolate a particularly feminine sexuality – one that exists and operates as presence and outside the law of the father, has led her into the realm of essentializing – a place Butler did not wish to go in her early work but explored more thoroughly in later works (particularly *Bodies that Matter* [2011]), acknowledging that certain behaviors do seem to persist despite efforts to define them as cultural products (29).

Butler’s earlier theory of performance – and drag in particular – seems tailor-made for a performer like West, ironically shaping her own performances of femininity on those of men-playing-women; thus, she, following, at first anyway, the mannerisms of famous drag queens Bert Savoy and Julian Eltinge, becoming a woman-playing-a-man-playing-a-woman. The question for this section is, as Butler puts it, “How is ‘being’ instituted and allocated through the signifying practices of the paternal economy?” (43). For performers like Mae West, who, as I will argue, have feminist messages to offer but prefer (or must) offer them to publics through indirect means, the very assumption of the “being” Butler discounts becomes the starting point for effective indirect rhetoric.

As was the case for Marcet Haldeman-Julius, who cloaked her feminist critiques of her abusive spouse, editor, and publisher in other women’s language, indirect rhetoric *begins* with a

public assumption of being: whether that being is as elemental as “being” a woman or as role-dependent as “being” the editor’s wife, the public’s orientation that one “is” such-and-such creates a particular space where feminist critique can exist and can be offered to audiences. Butler’s critique of heteronormativity as an ontology is important and, in 2012, is a well-accepted piece of the intellectual history of feminism and rhetoric, though it does no good to accept it without question, lest Butler’s important work fall into the kind of shallow academic repetition Foucault has been subjected to. I seek to go beyond the dilemma presented in Butler’s work, following Julia Walker’s lead. Walker explains that Butler’s theory of performance “appears to be premised upon a contradictory model of agency, presupposing both a limited subject, constrained by the discursive networks that hail it into being, and a voluntarist subject capable of exerting a parodistic will” (162). This subject-in-drag, in other words, both acknowledges the very limitation of being hailed within a heterosexual matrix, and even in the most extreme version of drag-type performance, is able to critique that matrix up to the point that the criticism points out, for Butler, the very constructedness of all gender. That is, the critique, here, suffers a kind of circularity, where we can only speak to the way we are constructed in language. As Julia Walker articulates, this “hopelessly [locks her subject] into a nominalist position, preventing her from speaking to the ways in which these terms are lived within the material conditions of reality” (166). The strength, then, of Butlerean drag-as-gender-critique, is imminently tied to eradicating all but the linguistic foundations of being itself, and when that eradication is complete, the agent is left without non-parodic agency, largely because Butler “pushes the issues of context and reception to the margins of her theory” (167).

Indeed reception and context comprise two of the three elements that constitute indirect feminist rhetoric; the third is technique. Mae West’s technique of indirect feminist rhetoric is

complicated and indeed defined by the fact that, unlike a performer in a drag show, she “is” what is being parodied, she lives in the body-made-unreal, *and* her message is scattershot, aiming at once to entertain the masses while stimulating, like a dog-whistle, those radicals in the audience who are inclined and attuned to her more radical critique of sexual power. This critique, which, like Butler’s, foregrounds the plasticity of gender roles, has a larger, more radical impulse. Indeed, West’s own drag-like performances serve as smokescreens for her lifelong commitment to gay rights; replacing ostracized bodies with her own, she becomes a simulacrum exhibiting, absorbing, and returning the audience’s gendered expectation, and this cooptation is the key to her success. Additionally, Mae West’s indirect feminism complements gay male life rather than working against it or ignoring it altogether. Without a doubt, she saw the fates of homosexual men in New York tied up with her own. As George Chauncey explains, “That gay men themselves shared this identification accounts, in part, for the popularity of ‘strong’ or ‘tough’ women, such as Mae West, as gay icons or drag personas” (61). These women, after all, “disdained convention, were determinedly and overtly sexual in character, and did what they needed to get what they wanted” (61).⁴⁷

The reason West as a historical and cultural actor provides a useful lens into Butler’s theories comes in what one might call “natural performance” – that West’s persona consists of a performative movement is not to be questioned, though the very artifice belies a core or depth there that never self-represents, allowing its very opacity to remain compulsory and enigmatic. In this way, West’s performances of gender go beyond drag, beyond camp, and into the realm of

⁴⁷ Carol Ward continues: “Homosexuals expressed an early affinity for West’s brand of exaggerated, flamboyant sexuality. Her pleas for tolerance toward gays (as demonstrated in her play *The Drag*) and her open affection for the ‘chorus boys’ who populated her backstage life were additional reasons for homosexual respect. As West remarked, ‘Male homosexuals are generally witty and talented, so I am interested in them’” (Ward 66).

feminist rhetoric; a terrain in which the Butlerean subject is caught sans subjecthood. Walker continues,

Even *on* the level of theory, though, Butler's notion of agency as a temporal dimension of subjectivity is problematic. Though it would seem to clear her of the charge that she has posited a contradictory model of the subject, it doesn't resolve that contradiction so much as occlude it by slipping between two different fields of analysis. One field operates according to a metaphor of space, where the subject is constrained, within a synchronic *structure* of discursive relations; the other operates according to a metaphor of time, where the subject is potentially free to resist those structures within a diachronically – marked *moment* in the process of their reproduction. (164)

In many ways, agents of indirect feminist rhetoric negotiate both the dimensions that Walker lays out, but their negotiation of those dimensions is successful, both because it promises less *in the moment* but also because its potential for unlimited interpretive power in the future remains unbounded. Characters like West move beyond the drag-subversion of gender normativity by activating future counterpublics *at the same time* as occupying dominant space in mass media, at the same time they themselves demonstrate and dance around the norm. Where Butler's subject subverts identity – as a philosophical category as well as a value locus – indirect feminist rhetors *assert* identity, albeit in the future. This assertion of identity *and identification* with future audiences, counterpublics, archipelagos of culture attuned to radical messages, *defines the rhetorical enterprise at work behind West's performatively indirect rhetoric*.

In terms of West's own rhetorical significations, though, her presentation subsumes Butlerean camp and at once multiplies its strategies. "For Butler," as for West, "nothing

succeeds in subverting the straight like excess” (Bergman 11). David Bergman elaborates that Butler “postulates some Ricardo-like law of the cultural imagination: recognition grows arithmetically, while signifiers can grow geometrically;” push up the supply side, and the gender system will collapse by its own weight” (11). This movement, though, of collapse through what Butler calls “subversive repetition enabled by [dominant, heterosexual] constructions” is bent on creating “possibilities of intervention” – but what types of intervention? This, exactly, is the location where Walker feels Butler’s theory breaks down, where the Butlanean agent/subject is both freed and constrained by the modes of dominant discourse (Walker 162). At the bottom of Walker’s critique of Butler is also an underlying warning about the shaky terrain of camp, which is placed by some scholars, from Susan Sontag to Scott Long, in a nether region of political efficacy. Even Sontag, Bergman reminds us, raised and then set aflame the banner of camp, arguing that its “sentimental relation to beauty is no help to women” (qtd in Bergman 8).

West’s camp functions as a consciousness-raising enterprise occasionally, while other times its political ramifications are subsumed in its own performances. Unlike Butlanean drag, Mae West, as a writer, rhetor, and performer, presents a kind of hide-and-seek quality that has great potential to grow signifiers geometrically, as Bergman phrases it. In this case, West’s clarion call is multivocal, directed at multiple audiences/audience members, and even, most radically, directed at a future audience. The Westean subject is unrestrained compared to the Butlanean always-in-drag subject, because as a woman performing a man performing a woman, West’s cacophonous persona could cast a very particular rhetorical net: (re)creating traditional heterosexual identifications with some members of the audience – a cooptation of her traditional audiences – and at the same time performing, almost magically, a doubleness that, more like the traditional Butlanean subject, summons the uncanny through humor, parody, and irony: she is

highly sexualized for one of her audiences *and* highly politicized for members of her own audiences. The bifurcation of these all-at-once personas is what makes West of particular importance to the history of rhetoric: hers is a double, perhaps a triple-identification – with traditional heteronormative sex symbol, with subversive drag operative, and with something that acknowledges both and supervenes them: West creates a kind of “*affective* identification,” as Davis explains it (referencing Freud), “with the other ... who is not (yet) a discrete object or image or form” (125).

Like her stage performances, West’s ascent to national recognition was not straightforward. From the teens to the middle twenties West shifted between traveling in stock companies, working bit parts on Broadway, and appearing on the bill at all levels of the Vaudeville circuit, from the vaunted Keith bookings to clubs across the country with less status and credibility. Mae West became known as the queen of the shimmy and for her infamous rendering of “Frankie and Johnny” (Watts 59). During these years, West worked with lots of partners and found herself particularly successful when paired with the dapper and talented jazz pianist Harry Richman, who, much to the chagrin of West’s business partner and sometime lover Jim Timony, started up a passionate affair with his costar that eventually ended with the duo’s involvement in what was to become West’s first Broadway starring role in *The Ginger Box Review*, sold to West by a crook named Paul DuPont (58). A few weeks into the production, while West kept busy honing her appeal as “The Vamp of Broadway,” working on songs like “I Want a Cave Man,” “I’m a Night School Teacher,” and “Sorry I Made You Cry,” DuPont disappeared (Watts 60). While the production sank further and faster into debt, the cast and crew became privy to the fact that DuPont, “also known by several other aliases, was really Edward Perkins, a producer with a long, disastrous track record” who had only a con man’s interest in the

production, leaving it, Watts recalls, “\$10,000 in the red” (61). To make matters worse, upon West’s departure from the failed play, Richman, despite an attractive and financially advantageous offer from the Keith circuit for a string of engagements, took off for his own first Broadway role, leaving West stranded. Tricked by a con artist and deserted by her partner, West came to the idea that it was time to turn her own luck by drafting her first full-length play, *The Hussy*.

As Watts recalls, though West never got *The Hussy* produced, it “was a milestone in her evolution,” allowing West to “craft her fictional presence through a new means – autobiographical confession” (61). Though *The Hussy* was a poorly written and unsuccessful reconstruction of *The Ruby Ring*, a developing sophistication is discernible in the text. Watts considers this play a turning point for the following reasons:

First, she not only developed a prototype of her stage persona but was also continuing her experimentation with the power of language. ... Next, West pits her character in a contest against men. Again, she demonstrates the mutability of identity, the transformative power of her tricksterism. (63)

Lastly, West develops strategic evasions of female superiority. “Men,” she explains, “never like to feel that you think you are superior to them” (Watts 63). Instead, “they want you to be and if they don’t think you are – it’s a lost cause where you’re concerned, but they don’t want you to know you are” (63). As West’s character in the play, Nona, warns her friends, “Never let a man see you care for him – keep him guessing” (63). Finally, though, *The Hussy* represents a turning point for West because it marks the moment when she started “to use her work to explore and renegotiate the realities of her existence and oppression” (64). The critical strain that undergirds most of her most important work in the twenties and thirties is born in *The Hussy*, which

represents a kind of pupa-like development of West's relationship to her own spectacular public persona as well as to her own strategies of dealing with powerful men, trauma, and traditional gendered expectations.

West's successful Broadway debut came only four years later with 1926's *SEX*, which opened at Daly's Theater on April 26th and ran well over 300 performances, surviving raids and shut downs by the NYPD, which hauled West to jail on charges of immorality. Of course, the media frenzy that surrounded West's arrest did wonders for the play, and it vaulted West into a stratum of fame new to even her. During its run,

West established her sensuality and desirability with an image that ran counter to the popular female archetype, the flapper. In part, this was by necessity. Now thirty-three, West was full-figured and did not possess the 1920's vogueish slim, flat-chested, and "boyish" physique. It did not go unnoticed – one critic decried her as "over plump" – but West chose to exploit rather than downplay her difference. Embracing her natural body, she used it to assert herself physically over *SEX*'s male characters. ... Mae had begun to construct her body as both a weapon of resistance and a battlefield, a place to wage war. (Watts 76)

In point of fact, what Watts notices during West's *SEX* years in the middle twenties, that she uses her body as a battlefield, was true for West's entire life – her body, both an object of abuse and an object of power, best exemplifies the complexity not just of West's situation but of her own attempts to wrangle financial, intellectual, and sexual control from an abusive, male world.

Though its box office suffered a bit in the heat of the summer, *Sex* continued to be a hit for well over a year, but its success did not satiate West, who, with her first Broadway hit under her belt, did something startling: she began writing plays in which she not only would not appear – but

plays that were designed only for an all homosexual male cast. Her interest in gay male subculture began during trips out to Harlem nightspots that featured female impersonators, and her early days impersonating a black man impersonating a white-man's version of a black man came flooding back when she witnessed this. At one such Harlem nightspot, she offered the whole cast free tickets to *SEX*, and those who showed up were asked to audition for West's new comedy, *The Drag* (Watts 82).

The Drag represents an enormous change in West's agenda. According to Lillian Schlissel, this script

refute[s] West's statement that she wrote because she needed material for the stage. She never appeared in *The Drag* ... [the] play was meant to be performed by a company of gay male actors while she starred in the heterosexual playgrounds of *SEX* and then *Diamond Lil*. Yet she was obsessed with the gay plays, revising and rewriting them through the 1970s, hoping to turn them into films. (2)

Schlissel goes on in an introduction she writes for a collection of West's plays that she republished in 1997 to say that the "vulgarity of Mae West plays was meant to disrupt standards of propriety ... to sow the seeds of revolution" (2). Schlissel goes on with what I consider to be a rather simplistic rendering of West's "frontal assault on verbal taboos" which "turn the Broadway stage into a battlefield" (6).

What strikes me as odd about these characterizations of West, though they may well apply to her own performances, is how *The Drag* reads so differently from most of her other work. It would be a stretch into fiction to call *The Drag* an assault of any kind; it is, rather, in my opinion, at least, quite the opposite: a philosophical meditation, a counter-propositional

rhetorical enterprise meant to slide a rhetoric of identification surgically through a spectacular cell-wall of audience expectation.

Michael Warner characterizes an important aspect of work that attempts to rehistoricize, recharacterize, commodities such as West's plays as radical bits of indirection that speak, to a degree, in code, that are future-oriented, that invoke radical audiences all the while that they throw sops to traditional audiences' value-sets. Warner explains that these types of performances, those that surreptitiously critique traditional gender norms, often address "a public that does not yet [fully] exist" (130). "[F]inding that their language can only circulate in channels that are hostile to it," rhetors like West tend to "write in a manner designed to be a placeholder for a future public" (130). Indeed, rhetors like West design their work to speak to divided audiences in different ways. In the delivery of one line, West can chastise a third of her crowd for their traditional attitudes, alienate a third of her crowd by way of a complete assault on their sacred assurances about sex and gender, and, at once, liberate, congratulate, and titillate the remaining third of the crowd. The latter "gets" the joke being told but also "gets" that the joke is on the other audience members as well. For West as for Williams, this type of audience incision/derision is as dangerous as it was evocative. While West's biographer, Jill Watts, argues that she just wanted to "cash in" on the bustling gay night life of Harlem and Greenwich Village, I argue that something more genuine pulls West toward these plays (83). Even if West wanted to "cash in," she was earning a continually excellent living from *SEX*, and, more important, any close study of West goes to show that before money, before fame, even, West loved the power of performance. Taking herself off stage and assuming the invisible role of writer may well represent the most incredible reversal in an already radically complex career. West knew that if the play made it to Broadway – which it almost certainly could not, due the

censorship campaigns being waged against her personally by New York district attorney Joab H. Banton – it would not be profitable for long. Even though the gay nightlife maintained a close and committed following, its biggest stars, Savoy and Eltinge, could not draw in the mainstream community and perhaps did not want to. West’s motives, then, paired with her lifelong obsession with and rewriting of these plays, remains a fascinating mystery.

That *The Drag* was meant to be played by a cast made up entirely of gay male actors, a move that immediately spectacularized the play and devolved quickly for West into legal difficulties, speaks to its placeholding status. As George Chauncey recalls in *Gay New York*, many historians and even newspapers at the time speculated that when West was arrested in 1926, ostensibly for starring in her play *Sex*, her incarceration was really on account of “the threat of *The Drag*’s being brought into the city” (313). In fact, it was a mere two months after West’s February 9, 1927 arrest that New York’s state legislature “amended the public obscenity code to include a ban on any play ‘depicting or dealing with the subject of sex degeneracy or sex perversion’” (Chauncey 313).

Of course, *The Drag*, with its threat of such indecency must have been the very epitome of West’s boundary-pushing, right? Wrong. This is what makes the play so interesting. It functions, despite having an all gay cast and adhering to the traditional spectacular characteristics of melodrama, as a play that humanizes as well as spectacularizes the struggles of members of dominated social strata. West, at least in the first two acts, attempts to insert what takes place off-stage, as it were, into the public transcript. According to Scott, the public transcript is typically characterized as a self-portrait of elites, one whose truth-value is jeopardized by its assumption of hegemonic expectations and of consequent performances from subordinate groups. Quite counter to her own starring roles, *The Drag* is rather serious, beginning with a

learned discussion between a jurist and a psychiatrist of Karl Heinrich Ulrich's theories of sexual inversion, theories that preceded and informed the more developed (and even more sympathetic) theories of Richard von Krafft-Ebing and later, Sigmund Freud. West admitted, upon researching these plays, to reading heavily in the subject matter of the day, from Freud to Krafft-Ebing to her favorites Ulrich and Havelock Ellis, who believed "homosexuals were 'inverts,' born with drives that had been turned inward" (Watts 82), drives that mirrored those of women, but nonetheless were populations that deserved legal and institutional respect and protection.

While Watts's renderings of West are almost all exquisitely wrought, her take on certain secondary subjects, topics seemingly tangential, leads her analysis astray occasionally. Her discussions of West's relationship with sexuality and its discussion in psychological literature are a case in point. Watts is correct to point out the effect of Havelock Ellis on Mae West, not only because he was a respected psychologist but also because of his unique publishing relationship with the Haldeman-Julius press. The Haldeman-Juliuses wooed Ellis to write for them and wound up publishing hundreds of thousands of his books condensed into 16,000 words. In short: Ellis's works on sexuality were in wide and cheap circulation, and his theories on homosexuality were published four years before Freud's "Three Essays on Sexuality" – not to mention that they gave the subject a much more in-depth treatment. Though Watts, too, is right to point out the importance of Ellis's theory of inversion, her analysis falls short in description. Ellis's theories of sexuality are hugely important to West, so much so that she will, after this period, often use his words verbatim and claim them as her own views. One such impulse comes in the push for acceptance of homosexual lifestyles that underlies Ellis's theory of inversion. In *Sexual Inversion*, he explains,

I had not at first proposed to devote a whole volume to sexual inversion. It may even be that I was inclined to slur it over as an unpleasant subject, and one that it was not wise to enlarge upon. But I found in time that several persons for whom I felt respect and admiration were the congenital subjects of this abnormality. At the same time I realized that in England, more than any other country, the law and public opinion combine to place a heavy penal burden and a severe social stigma on the manifestations of an instinct which to those persons who possess it frequently appears natural and normal. It was clear, therefore, that the matter was in special need of elucidation and discussion. (v)

Unlike Freud, Ellis sees inversion – a particularly unfortunate term – as more a political or even sociological problem than a purely psychological one. It is, in his view, a factor in all societies, a constant of sorts, and, in that vein, his work aims to lead readers to rethink their own positions in relation to homosexuality, rather than merely – like some of his contemporaries (such as Krafft-Ebing) wrapping the topic in scientific language. The first section of the book, importantly, includes a section on homosexuality, “Among Men of Exceptional Intellect and Moral Leaders,” while other sections cover homosexuality in animals, in soldiers, and among different cultures. That this section leads his study does not cover over the fact that Ellis still uses the unfortunate terms “inversion” and “abnormal” in his accounts, but it goes far in demarcating the problem of the *reception* of homosexuality as the real cultural malady.

In their initial discussion of Ulrich in the play’s opening moments, the judge pursues the traditional narrative of American masculinity, as he explains to the doctor that “A man is what he makes himself” (West 107), to which the doctor replies, speaking of one of his patients, that homosexuality is found “among persons of every state of society. It has held sway on the

thrones of kings, princes, scholars, and fools. Wealth, culture, refinement, makes no difference” (West 108). The two continue for most of the first act to debate what the judge calls culture’s obligation to “suppress” this impulse and “stamp it out of modern society” through the use of law and the police apparatuses (108). The doctor continues, always without irony, to inquire why the state should “force [these men] into secrecy and shame, for being what they cannot help being, by branding them as criminals and so lead them into the depths of misery and suicide” (108).

As the plot unfolds, the audience learns not only that the doctor’s daughter, Claire, and the judge’s son, Rolly, have just been married but that, unbeknownst to the doctor, Rolly is gay and has left his boyfriend in pursuit of another family associate, the straight engineer Allen Grayson. When Rolly arrives at his father-in-law’s home one afternoon, he finds his ex-lover, David, seeking treatment from the doctor and becomes frightened that David will let the secret out. Taking him violently in hand, Rolly demands to know whether David has told his father-in-law, to which David responds, earnestly, “It’s not so. I didn’t tell him I so much as knew you. I came because I thought he could help me” (116). Rolly responds and the scene ends with his belief that David is a fool, that the doctor “can do nothing for you – For any of us” (116). As David explodes with anger and despair, shaking his fist at Rolly, the doctor enters the room, confused. “My poor lad – What’s got into you? It may be the drug I’ve given him,” he explains to Rolly; “poor devil,” the doctor continues to his son-in-law, who is now visibly shaken, “Thank God, Rolly, you’re not what he is” (116).

Several rhetorical points of interest emerge here. First, other than David’s visit to Rolly’s father-in-law, nothing at all happens in this first act, and indeed in the second, that can be considered remotely campy or even melodramatic. But what do we make of West’s attempts to

take the very bruises of homosexual life, the very banalities of secret shame, and to project them – these difficult social truths – onto a medium so spectacular as theater?

In many ways, answering this question – at least as it relates to indirect rhetoric – requires a short digression into the nature of spectacle as it develops out of critical theory. The language of spectacle, like the language of queer identity in West's work, is a language of "inversion." Spectacle, of course, gets its best and earliest explication by French Situationist Guy Debord's work *Society of Spectacle*, which characterizes the spectacle as "a concrete inversion of life" (12) that "serves as total justification for the conditions and aims of the existing system" (13), a complex, multi-layered, ethotic, sleight of hand, wielded by the dominant class, whose major effect, for Debord anyway, is the transforming of "[a]ll that once was directly lived" into "mere representation" (12). Jacques Ranciere, also a radical Frenchman with Marxist sympathies (and a former collaborator of Louis Althusser's), refers to spectacle's role in capitalist ideology, attributing spectacle as an important element of its staying power, its impenetrability, playing on what Debord calls the tautological character of spectacle, its equivalency of means and ends; it becomes a negation of life, he explains, "that has invented a visual form of itself" (14). For Ranciere, it is capable of dismissing, incorporating, or coopting any oppositional force.

West uses spectacle slightly differently, though, at least in *The Drag*. She inserts a spectacle within the spectacle, as it were. In *Film Fables*, Ranciere explains that "the spectacle within the spectacle will force the hypocrite into the open" (35). In the case of West's play, the hypocrite, if sensitized correctly by her rhetoric, becomes a particularly characterized invocation of the audience. This is true not just in West's notably non-ironic treatment of Rolly's life but also his death as well.

The element about *The Drag* that is most fascinating and at once most confounding is the structure of act three, which is, almost in its entirety a huge drag show. The tone of the play changes completely for several pages of singing and dancing that take of the vast majority of the third act, pages where the narrative arc of Rolly's life is completely ignored and the pure spectacle of drag is engaged. The drag extravaganza provides one of two parallel events that shape the play's third act. The other is Rolly's murder. As the spectacular queens run about the stage, Rolly is shot by David in a manic move, one that is clearly the product of the pressure of secrecy, of not being seen, of not being heard. David confronts Judge Kingsbury, Rolly's father, in a somewhat grandiose but heartfelt soliloquy at the end, saying

You Judge Kingsbury – the great supporter of justice – you would crush me,
destroy me – but your son was the same as I. Yes, I killed him. I came into the
garden – I heard all the music, the singing, the dancing – I waited until they were
all gone. Then I shot him. When you condemn me, you condemn him. A judge's
son can be just the same as another man's son – yes, a king's son, a fool's son.

(West 139)

Interestingly, the drag is the catalyst of David's becoming real through the violent erasure of his ex-love. Against the backdrop of a raucous and orgiastic celebration of male sexuality, against a spectacle and within a spectacle that foregrounds the act of seeing and being seen, the judge turns simply to the inspector and says "Report this – a case of – of suicide ..." (West 140). As the curtain closes, then, *The Drag* brings into almost unbearable tension the unhappy collision of the hyper-visible and historically invisible elements of queer sexuality, of gender expectation, and of the audience's public culpability. The fact that West rewrote *The Drag* over and over, even into the 1970s, suggests that she herself struggled with what is seen and what is unseen,

what is spectacular and what is real, what is just and what is feasible, what, in terms of the politics of history, is life and what is death.

I read this work as a radical act of gender insubordination on West's behalf, one that subtly trumps her other, more ostentatious work. *The Drag* demonstrates a legacy quite different from that of West as the type of person Ranciere calls "a burlesque automaton," one who is "aesthetically constituted," one who is "a hero of pure spectacle" (12). If anything, the complexities of *The Drag* represent, for those of us in West's future audiences who hope for more than entertainment, who long for political visionaries with radical and subtle rhetorical modes and methods, West's most poignant investigation, not just of gender performance, but of the spectacle itself, wrapping her into the longstanding political and ideological questions raised by critical theorists, moving West from, as Marybeth Hamilton refers to her, "... a female drag queen who personified camp," to a social critic who both used camp and defined its limitations for social justice (1).

The significant part of *The Drag*, though, comes in its distinct *lack* of camp. Yes, the grand spectacle at the end demonstrates a free-for-all of homosexual male desire, but it is a jumble and ultimately works only to cover over the act of murder. For some reason, perhaps because it was shut down within a week in Bridgeport Connecticut and never made it to Broadway, or perhaps because it failed to fully convey the delight and frivolity of the gay lifestyle, a frivolity that West successfully conveyed about the heterosexual one, West considered the play a failure. But this was not a failure she would let go easily, another sign that the subject matter had a real and deep link to the otherwise slippery biographical Mae West. Schilissel continues, during the huge success of 1928's *Diamond Lil*,

Mae West began to rewrite *The Drag*. It may have been unquenchable egotism, the stubborn refusal to let the Broadway establishment and the police shut her down. It may have been her affinity for the subject of gay life. In any event, *The Drag* was probably the only play Mae West ever seriously rewrote, and when it was finished and retitled *The Pleasure Man*, it was a stronger, more dramatically astonishing play than anything she would write thereafter. (18)

The differences in the two plays are clues to West's motives. First, and probably most important, West wanted this play produced, and the most expedient avenue toward that end was to change *The Drag*'s main character, Rolly, from a homosexual to a heterosexual. This augmentation, though, masked a more sinister loss. While Rodney Terrill (the Rolly character rewritten as a heterosexual and made more palatable for tamer audiences), the roguish ladies-man actor impregnates a young girl whom he quickly forgets, who dies in a low-budget abortion, his lack of feeling is impudent and transparent. For Rolly, the young homosexual man who married the judge's daughter to hide his sexuality, a deeper problem is afoot – a more purely dramatic – rather than melodramatic one. Rolly's marriage and eventual murder highlight his plight as a social outcast who is condemned to a lonely and invisible existence. Rolly makes horrible mistakes in that play, including not caring for his young, innocent wife, but his mistakes hang on him like so many hooks until he is finally dragged into the abyss by his murderer at the end. The murderer, too, exhibits the abysmal loneliness of the social outcast, and when Rolly is murdered, his father buries his son's secret with him – preferring he is remembered as a suicide rather than who he really was. Here, in the gay plays, West escapes her own structuration as a rhetorical figure/body in space by figuring gay men's lives. Her uncharacteristic disappearance here, too, indicates a turn on her part to highlight traumas in the gay community as a way of both

negotiating her own early experience and extending her performative, writerly power. West the spectacle and Rolly, in particular, function metonymically in the loss of name and identity, function as responses to the threat, always abounding in traumatic violence, of erasure. In this testament to Rolly's erasure, West's rhetorical figuring, her exadversive indirect rhetoric is at its most powerfully ethical and its most fundamentally indirect.

Though *The Pleasure Man* certainly maintains the focus on homosexual men, it backgrounds the dramatic elements of that lifestyle behind a much more convincing camp-screen. It is this overdone façade in *The Pleasure Man* that has caused certain scholars to generalize that West was exploiting the New York gay culture in the 1920s. As Kaier Curtin argues, her "persistent, mercenary attempts to exploit gay transvestites in the 1920's stirred neither public tolerance nor compassion. It reinforced the stereotyping of gay men as vulgar, sex-obsessed effeminates" (qtd. in Schlissel 25). Curtin, I think, misses the point of *The Pleasure Man* and certainly misses the point of *The Drag*. George Chauncey sees Mae West's affection for Bert Savoy as the driving factor behind these performances. Schlissel continues,

[T]he subject that preoccupied her in *The Drag* and in *The Pleasure Man* was not so much homosexuality [which she understood better than most] as sexual instability and the ways in which sexual identities are transformed. ... Terrill's villainy is defined not by his seduction of a young girl but because he is a chameleon. He is not what he seems. Paradise [the main drag queen] recognizes the duplicity. "I always knew you were a rotter ... don't try to scare me – what I know, I know, and that's that. "If you're a man, thank God I'm a female impersonator."

In the strange ethical architecture of the gay plays, Paradise and all the “queers” are the world’s innocents. They do not lie about who they are. Their fantastic gowns and “disguises” confirm their identity. The “straight” world is disguised and the gay world is “straight.” The ethical paradox at the heart of *The Pleasure Man* was not lost on Mae West’s gay audiences, although it seems to have been lost by most readers. (26-27)

The honesty of the gay men who populate *The Drag*, in a performative honesty, one fundamental to West herself: to “put on” is to demonstrate the truth of oneself, a truth manifest in both layered sophistication and ostentatious grandiosity. Here, again, and to great effect, in her usual exadversive way, inverts an inversion. In 1934, when West recalled the difficulties she experienced in the production of those plays, her tone was close to righteous indignation. “I was ten years ahead of my time. Some day, I’m going to produce those plays again ... We make things that exist too important by whispering about ‘em, rather than bringin’ ‘em right out into the open. We talk around a subject and make it something it isn’t” (Ward 116).

It is possible that, in that recollection, West was being mildly facetious. Doubtless, though, rather, she seems preoccupied with making these questions public. She injects divided audiences into the middle of gender quandaries. If it is possible to determine one unchanging element in Mae West’s persona in all its varied plasticity, as both a performer and a writer, it is her publicness, her consistent desire for and pursuit of *display*. As Justus Nieland argues in *Feeling Modern*, “publicness,” though a strange word, works differently than “publicity” or “the public sphere,” the former conjuring “industrial-commercial media technologies” and the latter “Habermasian forums of rational-critical debate” (1). Publicness describes an array of “encounters with public life in the early twentieth century,” and while Nieland’s aim is to

recover modernism's affective registers in those encounters, his analytic scheme of searching for "their experimental, embodied, and affective dimensions" provides a framework that also helps to uncover West's use of indirect feminist rhetoric, a rhetoric that contains elements of the modern while rejecting others (1).

Freud, whose philosophy of the divided, largely unavailable, desirous self underpins so much of public life in the first decades of the twentieth century, particularly those ensconced in "publicness," remained a muse for West, as well as Ulrich and Ellis. The public, perhaps, served as a kind of inverse of the unconscious, a place upon which to play out desire, a place in which to be known and therefore to know one's self. Hers was a public sexuality and below it a public subversion of sexuality, and both elements – the overt and the covert – were fastened to West's ability to create and fulfill public desire, to suture herself, her image, and even her writing, to the public's desire for libidinous indulgence and political challenge.

Conclusion: Marriage and the Limits of Rhetorical Character Space

Despite her ever-evolving diaphanous sexuality and public persona, a terrible secret haunted Mae West through those Broadway years, though she managed to keep it hidden until 1935, well into her Hollywood foray: Mae West was married and had been married for 24 years. Before West's name was nationally known, she wooed and signed on to perform with a lanky, young jazz dancer, Frank Wallace, formerly Frank Szatkus, the son of a Lithuanian tailor, in 1911. According to Eells and Musgrove,

Frank wasn't tall, dark and handsome. He was of medium height and merely a pleasant appearance, but his jazz dancing was a hit with audiences. Mae, thinking

she detected a big personality – and with Mae, bigger was always better –
proposed to Wallace that they do a double. (28)

Wallace was soon smitten with West, who, only in her teens, had already perfected the kinds of antics she would become known for. She dressed

in pink rompers with grey oxfords, wore no stockings and would unnerve Wallace by lying on her back, throwing her shapely legs in the air and engaging in a bicycling motion. Whenever Wallace volunteered to show her a pleasanter exercise, Mae would leap up and insist they tend to business. It was agreed that he dance and fake the singing while she would do the opposite. (Eells and Musgrove 28)

After their 10 week tour, the duo was hired to perform with Hugh Herbert and opera singer Etta Woods in Jacobs and Jermond's *Sporting Widow*. Though Wallace had, at the time, considered the two a couple, the 17 year old West made the sexual rounds with several of the other men in the troop, much to the chagrin of her colleagues. One night, the older, more experienced Woods "took Mae aside to warn that with the hordes of men who were perusing and too often catching her, sooner or later she would find herself pregnant" (Eells and Musgrove 30). West admitted Woods had a point and on April 11, 1911 married Frank Wallace. Watts speculates that West may have married Wallace not just for cover of her multiple lovers but indeed because she suspected she may have become pregnant. Though he later attested that the two were very much in love, they spent their wedding night in separate rooms and soon West would lock him in at night, laughing as she left at midnight for a lover and returned at 3:00 am. As Ward explains, West was "immediately disappointed with the constraints of a legalized marriage and determined to find a way out of her contract as painlessly as possible" (5). Soon, telling Wallace that he had

to keep the marriage a secret and that her mother wanted her to tour solo, West dropped Wallace. She “never satisfactorily explained her behavior in this regrettable marriage, for she never liked to admit her mistakes” (Ward 5). Of all the strange qualities of West’s life and career, this marriage remains the toughest to explain – it would also, eventually, all but end her career.

The middle years of the 1930s were difficult for West. In 1934, she barred her longtime friend, agent, lawyer, sometime-lover, and confidant, Jim Timony, from all movie sets, and in 1935 she experienced the death of her father. Though she had successfully made the transition from Broadway to Hollywood, agents of the Hays Office continued to single her out, and by 1935 Joseph Breen, the cinema-savvy, tough-minded, wildly anti-Semitic Catholic who took the helm from Will Hays, dug through each of West’s scripts with singular tenacity, forcing her, if she wanted her films made, to rewrite multiple times, excising any lines that might contain the potential for Westian double-entendre. By 1935, despite being in Hollywood only for a short time, West had made several successful films, including *She Done Him Wrong*, *I’m No Angel*, *Belle of the Nineties*, and *Goin’ to Town*. West went so far, with her next film, 1936’s *Klondike Annie*, as to screen an entirely different version of the film for Breen than the one that went out to popular audiences. But, by 1936, West’s popularity was declining, not only because of Breen’s consistent removal of her more interesting material but because, though “Paramount had promoted her as down-to-earth ... rumors of her extreme behavior trickled out to the public. Co-workers seemed more willing to testify that she was demanding, high-strung, and capricious” (Watts 200). Most important to West’s sudden decline, though, in my opinion, was the discovery of her marriage to Frank Wallace.

It turned out that Myrtle Sands, a Milwaukee WPA worker assigned to refile old vital records, had stumbled across a marriage certificate that bore the name of a

Mae West of Brooklyn, New York, who in April 1911 had married a Frank Wallace. Sands notified the local press, and they immediately located an old review of *A Florida Enchantment* [also called *Sporting Widow*] praising the dancing team of Wallace and West. By April 22, Associated Press newswires carried the story across the country. Fans read headlines proclaiming, “Mae West in 1911 Wed in Milwaukee,” and scrutinized a hazy facsimile of the marriage certificate. (Watts 202)

The news devastated West and her public, and for several months after the story ran, West denied the marriage. “The marriage severely threatened West’s star persona” (Watts 202) because not only did it inform the public of West’s real age (now over forty), it also cast the star’s wealth and lavish living arrangements in stark contrast to her impoverished husband (202). “In part,” Watts explains, “her image rested on her rejection of the cult of domesticity and its most fundamental institution, marriage” (203). “The appearance of a husband jeopardized this rebellion. ... [F]or West to be married was unthinkable, a contradiction to her image as an independent woman resisting male domination” (203).

Watts’s view here is correct, I think, though she misses the rhetorical element to West’s marriage disaster. It is indeed true that her marriage worked against her commitment to sexual and social independence, but, more importantly for this analysis, it bounded and invalidated the rhetorical character space that West claimed; invalidated her principle rhetorical trope: the assertion through double-negative of a powerful space of signification, a blank canvas upon which America could project their innermost desires. No longer was West “America’s most inviting sex symbol”; rather, she “was a married woman” (Watts 202). Her open identity, her rhetorical mastery gone, she was turned from “a freewheeling celebrant of Eros into one of the

era's most shameful of female figures, an adulteress" (203). More important, though, than that shameful position, for West, is the abrupt closedness of her previously and uniquely open sematic-figural space. Mae West was, for the first time, bounded, parametricized, closed in. Out of the ether of her fictional space, the real, biographical West emerged for her public. Her career would never be the same.

Despite her fall from grace in the middle thirties, West's indirection, her near constant use of exadversive techniques in the creation of her ironic works and performative persona, makes her an exceptionally difficult and fruitful rhetor to analyze. West's work, her comedy, her irony, her camp is, according to Pamela Robertson, "a structural activity" that "has an affinity with feminist discussions of gender construction, performance, and enactment" (57). Robertson continues that these modes of being and performing both articulate and subvert "the image- and culture-making processes to which women *have* traditionally been given access" (57). She is feminist only – but strongly – through indirect means, and it "can only be described as feminist because it parodies drag by *replacing* and *displacing* it with the hyperbolization of the feminine through the masquerade," Robertson explains; she "recuperates this aesthetic *as* a feminine aesthetic" (63).

Even throughout her experimentations on gender performance, power, trauma, and violence as they appear in the gay plays, West's feminism shines through. Her work is indirectly feminist because, like Bert Williams's anti-racist performances, she highlights the traditional models of seeing and being as constructed, and her comfort in that constructed space with all its luminal fluidity, characterized not just her work but her persona as well. In short, *it is West's exadversive work on her audiences* (in moments where her extradiegetical assertions reinscribe the biographical West as desiring and desired, as playful and in-control, as subject and object,

moments that, like dogwhistles, are not noticeable to any but the keenest, the campiest, the queerest, or the most radically feminist observers) *that makes her feminist*, and though it is essential to recognize that not all audience members' worldviews will be marked or complicated by West's work (some will always see her as untalented, unaware, etc.), others walk away with a slightly fragmented sense of gender power, one in which the frame of gender and the frame of reality sit, however, subtly askew. West herself walks effortlessly between them. It is this gift that West bestows then and now upon her audiences, the gift of the open question, the gift of the call-to-action, or, at least, the gift of the intellectual itch, the worm of uncertainty. And it is in this that Mae West's indirect feminist rhetoric, her ironic exadversion, her proposition through double-negatives, where the recalcitrant other is both posited and then unmarred, forced into the diaphanous orbit in and among other Others, where selves are not self-same, where seduction conquers production, where irony, as Jeffrey Murray reminds us, becomes an ethical challenge (29). It is in this ether where consubstantiality is created. Murray explains,

Burke goes on to claim that irony "is based upon a sense of fundamental kinship" and of "being consubstantial" (514). But note that he gets ahead of himself. Irony is not "based upon" an existing consubstantiality, but upon symbolic-phenomenological recalcitrance. A particular way of seeing becomes ironized when it is called into question by another way of seeing. The result of that ironizing may be that one becomes consubstantial with the Other for irony to occur. Quite often, irony arises from Others with whom one is not already consubstantial. (29)

West's particular method of indirection both creates recognition of the recalcitrant Other, but it does something beyond both Burke and Murray here, too: in the positing of the view of the

recalcitrant Other, West's work destabilizes that other as well. So, a Westian indirect-rhetorical ethics is not one of producing consubstantiation, almost the opposite. In denying the possibility or even desire for consubstantiation, where selves are coequal and language is propositional, West circumvents misuse of traditional propositional and gender norms.

Here, theater for West becomes a mediation aimed at the dissolution of the gender roles that underlie its parody and hence its power. Therefore, theater for West is a mediation aimed, ultimately, at its own dissolution, just as the Mae West character, even in her reemergence as a meta-figure in the 1960s and 1970s is aimed at self-evacuation-through-self-parody. This, is both the limit of the art West produces, and it is also its highest compliment. As Ranciere reminds us, "art do[es] not supply weapons for battles" (103). Rather, it "can help sketch new configurations of what can be seen, what can be said and what can be thought and, consequently, a new landscape of the possible. But," he explains, it can "do so on condition that their meaning or effect is not anticipated" (103). Mae West's radical work is indirect and feminist, ultimately, because it is based on an evasion of propositional discourse that serves not to undermine its validity but to amplify its accessibility and electrify its message.

Chapter 5

Conclusion: Strange Currencies

In “The Book I Couldn’t Write: Alice Paul and the Challenge of Feminist Biography,” celebrated women’s and feminist historian Susan Ware draws attention to what she calls a hallmark of “recent feminist biography,” its “focus on the interplay between the personal and political in constructing the narratives of individual women’s lives” (13). Ware’s piece focuses not on her success as an author, though, despite her celebrated biographies of Amelia Earhart, Molly Dewson, Mary Margaret McBride, and, most recently, Billie Jean King. Rather, Ware’s piece in the *Journal of Women’s History* focuses upon the very particular problem of writing feminist histories in which the subjects “are not amenable to such an approach” (13), as she discovered in her attempted biography of Alice Paul, whose seemingly complete devotion to the cause of feminism and whose control over her archives and public memory left no distinctions between her personal and public lives, exactly the distinctions sought after by historians of women and feminism. She explains,

In a profound failure of my historical imagination, I found myself at a total loss when searching for an overarching theme or hypothesis to make her life story compelling and relevant to contemporary readers. ... How can you write a feminist biography when your subject has left no trail of breadcrumbs (as a friend called them) to recreate any kind of interior or personal life? (14)

Ware’s predicament is both diametrically opposite the predicament that I faced when first conceiving of this project and fundamentally instructive for it. Unlike Ware, my subjects had rich, complicated personal lives, but also unlike Ware, my subjects did not claim feminism; so while their rich interiorities may have been instructive or interesting enough for contemporary

readers, their relation to feminism seemed all but absent, at least in a propositional way. Instead of a trail of breadcrumbs of an interior life, one that Ware struggled and ultimately failed to determine in her year-long study of Alice Paul, an original and century-long advocate for what ultimately became a failed equal rights amendment, my absent clue set seemed to exist in the liminal spaces around my subjects' discourses and feelings about what feminism meant in their historical moments. Feminism, as it existed in their lives, in the lexicons and political agencies available to them, was simply not attractive; so, a traditional feminist biography would not be appropriate. Any biographical work that attempted to narrativize and explore the relationships between their inner lives, traumas, and incipient feminisms had to rely on rhetoric as an intermediary.

Attention to rhetoric is not a magic pill that solves the problems inherent in the historical absences or gaps I found in the public lives of Marcet Haldeman-Julius, Anita Loos, and Mae West, but it does allow me to insert myself conspicuously and honestly into the project of historical imagination, recovery, and interpretation. Indeed, it is the rhetorical scholar's interpretation of events, the political, hermeneutic, and personal preferences he or she carries internally, that often largely determine the rhetorical character of an event – beyond banal taxonomy. This place of subjective location, infused with chance and characterized to a great degree by a scholar's own agenda or interpretative lens, makes the study of rhetoric, at least in this instance, ambitiously unstable, full of tentative assertions that represent more of a relationship with subjects than a modernist portrayal or "summing up," attempting to catch subjects in action, with all available (often overdetermined) motives, means, personal idiosyncrasies, and ambivalences. Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa Kirsch call this approach strategic contemplation:

Strategic contemplation involves engaging in a dialogue, in an exchange, with the women who are our historical subjects, even if only imaginatively, to understand their words, their visions, their priorities whether and perhaps especially when they differ from our own. As Cheryl Glenn suggests in her groundbreaking work on the rhetoric of silence, it involves recognizing – and learning to listen to – silence as a rhetorically powerful act. It entails creating a space where we can see and hold contradictions without rushing to immediate closure, to neat resolutions, or to cozy hierarchies and binaries. ... Central to such an open, contemplative stance are questions such as these: What do we notice when we stand back and observe? What emerges most prominently? How do we imagine, connect with, and open up a space for the women – and others – we study? How does their work, their rhetorical prowess, their activism speak to us, inspire us, and help us understand the past as well as the present? ... Finally, strategic contemplation means recognizing what was made possible for us as feminist rhetorical scholars through other women's work, how their efforts have enabled us to stand where we are today, and how their visions make it possible for us to imagine a future worth working for. (21-23)

Giving attention to *feminist* rhetoric, then, means situating one's self in a milieu that not only honestly engages but also embraces the pitfalls of interpretation, of meaningful and often confusing connection with subjects. Most respectful to subjects, this approach foregrounds the scholar's limited frame *but also* encourages future discussion, allowing, even constructing, cracks through which more analysis and more extensive conversation can and should occur. This work moves even further in the direction of those conversations that push the limits of

traditional narrative history as well as traditional rhetorical studies, complicating the relationship between historical subjects and truth as a unquestioned construct; indirection works against all these. As Ballif suggests, here, “[w]oman is a riddle, a paradox, an *aporia*” (125), distancing us from the terrible truth. And what, she asks, “is this terrible truth? That truth is not; that it is Woman” (126).

Articulating the use to which rhetorical indirection was put by this cohort of women rhetors has the potential to add significantly to conversations in rhetorical studies and composition studies. For rhetoricians, the evidence of this effective indirection challenges the idea that rhetoric takes place only or most effectively out in the open, the terrain of traditional propositional debate. Indeed, these women, unlike the physically constrained populations studied by James C. Scott, *choose* rhetorical indirection – for various reasons: Haldeman-Julius – out of a wonderfully salacious deviance in response to her traumatic marriage – desires to reach an audience through the critique of her principle gatekeeper while keeping him both out of the joke and out of range of propositional debate; Loos, on the other hand, develops her critical eye toward masculinity early on in her complex relation to her absentee father, and it manifests early in her career writing for the movies to slyly mock Douglas Fairbanks to impress D.W. Griffith and John Emerson, becoming fully developed through domestic and marital trauma analogous to Haldeman-Julius’s, with her abusive husband serving as her director and her critique being aimed as his avatars, particularly H.L. Mencken; finally, West’s indirection takes into question the very possibility of traditional gender norms, such as the norms that make possible masculinist power, and her most complex development comes in the cultivation of herself as a kind of rhetorical space, a rhetorical figure, a sashaying laboratory of gendered experimentation outside and above traditional gender relations, despite doing everything in her power to hide her early

marriage (and the significance that she is just, after all, a woman) to Frank Wallace – the trauma of this marriage being merely its existence and its challenge to West’s meta-critique/character space.

For rhetorical scholars, these women themselves represent a brave new terrain of rhetorical critique – one that has just begun to be hinted at by scholars like Joseph Janangelo, who articulates the need for studies such as this one, studies of celebrity rhetoric: “[w]hile we rhetorical critics and theorists have felt increasingly committed to analyzing public discourse,” some of us “have not paid as much attention as we should to these particular uses of media, which engage mass attention” if “the rhetor is an entertainer rather than, say, a politician” (158). Celebrity rhetorics deserve analysis, especially, as in this study, when the rise of a celebrity’s rhetoric coincides with the advent of a newly emergent modality of writing: for Haldeman-Julius, it was personality journalism; for Loos, it was scenarios and titles for early American cinema; and for West, in the period I investigate, anyway (as she wrote in several mediums) it was the early years of the Broadway musical, rife with spectacle.

This trio remains a curious set of rhetors to study because unlike most work on women in rhetoric and composition, these rhetors maintained, largely, apolitical guises. From Aspasia to Susan B. Anthony, traditional subjects of feminist rhetorical recovery have been political or politicized women; instead, this cohort of celebrity rhetors functioned indirectly, in one sense anyway, because they presented themselves as apolitical, depoliticized, uncomprehending, or simply disinterested. Rather, they went for fashion, for humor, flying well under the radar – one of the reasons that most scholars have left them out of feminist history and the history of rhetoric.

So, in a strange way, this study functions as a kind of recovery, a concept well-tended in feminist rhetorical scholarship. The fruits of this kind of recovery, though, blossom obliquely, and the recovery of women like these involves a redefinition of materials already seen, special attention to motive, and an attempt to dig into thick descriptions of rhetorical situations, descriptions that pay attention to materials overlooked by many historians of rhetoric. This is a recovery out in the open, of women who are/were famous, known, of celebrity women; it is a recovery of rhetoric's role in their struggles, of the exigencies born out of situations of domestic trauma, the negotiation of gatekeepers, the grappling with the strictures of what is and is not allowable in public discourse, the reading of humor's layers, at last, a conversation with what *was and was not said or sayable*.

For composition studies, the study indirect type of writing in public situations can inform classroom discussions about what is allowable in public settings, encouraging discussion about the insidious and even sinister embeddedness of hierarchies of social power and privilege. It asks students to consider, in their own written academic work, not only what is acceptable in academic prose but how to push those boundaries through the use of humor, indirection, cooptation. Composition studies classrooms should become spaces where all the questions of social power and social acceptability are at play and attention should be paid to the entire spectrum of linguistic and rhetorical power as it interacts with developing modalities of writing and technology. Indirect feminist rhetoric, in this instance, at least, is tied very closely to questions of technology, and it involves the admission that rhetoric itself, as Amy Koerber reminds us, is a "technology" (25), a tool that helps its users (speakers and writers) accomplish the task of constructing meaning," invoking audiences, and raising consciousness (59). She continues,

feminist scholars should ask questions that attempt to account for the complex relationships that exist between technology and conceptions of gender in society. Such questions should attempt to determine what we can learn about the political effects and consequences of technology. (Koerber 66)

The study of indirection in written discourse should, for contemporary writing students, be historically situated, embedded in the technologies into which it folds, and partially responsible for (and traceable to) the larger social and cultural events it feeds and is fed by.

Composition studies, as a discipline interested in the production and analysis of written texts and their relations with power, education, and social movement, has a vested interest in the study of indirection. Gutenberg's printing press served as a necessary but not sufficient condition for Martin Luther's epoch-changing principles of faith alone, scripture alone, and the priesthood of all believers in its dependence upon the availability and accessibility of the biblical text, increasing literacy rates, and growing discontent with the stultifying presence of the Catholic Church's bureaucracy and greed. The rise of newspaper and pamphleteering culture gave way to the advent of the epoch of the (male) citizen, the French and American Revolutions. And now, the rise of social media thrusts writing and rhetoric forward into the unknown terrain of the Arab Spring and its complicated aftershocks. Part of this story, a part we in rhetorical and composition studies remain at least partially responsible for telling, has been left out. This is the story offered in this work, a story of gendered critique, of powerful and empowered women negotiating the realities of male privilege in and through the emergent technologies of personality journalism, early American cinema, and Broadway spectacle – all of which coincide and with a generation of women who functioned in a space that was ostensibly politically, sexually, and socially liberated, a space where women could vote, could practice safe methods of

birth control, could work, *could write*. These conditions of liberation, though, brought with them the new and fluid constraints of a coalescing mass consciousness under the spectacle of entertainment. Here, the public is accessible, but only under the conditions of the sayable, the acceptable, and these conditions brought with them specific limitations on what public women could say, should say, or even what public audiences could hear. These were middling audiences with ears unturned to oblique critique. The women of this study wrote for small selections within these audiences, those whose perceptions were pitched up, whose ears were sensitized to the frequencies of the radical within the mundane; the specialized within the popular.

The study of indirect rhetoric, in general, has great potential in rhetorical studies, with many and varied possible applications. Any time when the free exchange of language is inhibited, indirect rhetoric is almost certainly afoot. Any time when a rhetor wants to make use of language that critiques another but denies the potential for a counter-response, indirection is at play. In every situation, indirection is partially a function of the modality in which it is articulated, which should make the study of digital writing rife with potential spaces for meaningful analysis. Any such analysis, though, must always be closely tied to the person, their complex motives, exigencies, etc. Unlike Bitzer's or even Vatz's notions of the rhetorical situation, though, indirect rhetoric typically lives in multiple, ambiguous spaces, and any rendering of it must embrace partiality, must consist to some degree of a gesture forward toward the conversational openness hinted at by Royster and Kirsch. Because indirection avoids or coopts propositional discourse, its study must to some degree be indirect as well.

This partiality or ambiguity, though, is a strength, not a weakness. It is the work of rhetoric to suggest what comes after the orgy, to draw from Ballif's riff on Baudrillard's essay

title (“What Are You Doing after the Orgy?”), the orgy of modernism, the orgy of truth-telling, of claims-making, of political excess. She explains,

His title comes from the brief anecdote in which, during an orgy, a man whispers this unexpected question into a woman’s ear. This anecdote encapsulates Baudrillard’s theoretical strategy: to ask what comes after the obscene; to wonder what lies the banality of truth, meaning, and representation; to question the joint project of modernism, humanism, Marxism, psychoanalysis, hermeneutics, semiotics, philosophy, criticism, and all other systems of production, which have attempted to master, to dominate, to appropriate the unrepresentable and thus render it obscene. (129)

The partiality represented in any study of indirection underscores a rejection of the sequestration of the unrepresentable into the realm of the obscene; it is a partiality rendered meaningful exactly in its conversation with that which is unsayable, counterpropositional, unexpected, or unacceptable. Not amending itself to a philosophy to render it comprehensible, the study of indirection, writ large, is part of the answer to what comes after the orgy. Not without meaning, not without consequence, a humanized but not humanist reality in which motive and contradiction, fundamental aspects of human social intercourse, are brought to light while other aspects are obscured.

A theory of indirection, then, in a sense, would be contradiction in terms, or it would blend into postmodern multiplicity or simulations and thus obscure its larger productive capacity. Indirect rhetoric is rhetoric that, formally speaking, denies, circumvents, or parodies its exigence, and functions – when it works, anyway – to coopt mass audiences, to garner the attention of subsets that may be sensitized to watch for radical critique or revolutionary messages in mass-

produced, middling, popular work. A theory of indirection, then, if it were to exist, would be a theory about how humanity works itself around the fabric of propositionality, in the spaces and interstices of propositional discourse, thus working against and underneath the gatekeepers to publics. The formal properties of indirection draw shape around and among the spaces in which propositions cannot be made or, for whatever strategic reason, are not made, and in so doing it does not amend itself to content, such as, say, feminism.

Feminism and indirection share no organic ties beyond their situational origins; nor should studies of indirect feminism overtake studies of propositional or overtly political feminism. They must work alongside each other, given voice by scholars who seek, together, to tell a more comprehensive story, not a more coherent story. The divergency of coherence in women's history, the flood of ambiguity and difference in women's stories and approaches to telling those stories bodes well for the future of women's history and feminist rhetoric. No longer do scholars of feminist rhetoric need to defend the women we study, need to place them firmly in liberal discourses amenable to flattery in academe. In fact, what indirect feminist rhetoric allows us to do is to allow the forms of indirect discourse to lead us to discussions about feminisms lurking below the surface of propositionality and social license, drawing scholars into the quiet corners of conversations that, up till now, created the din against which we have created our scholarship. These conversations, these women, are no longer inaccessible; we can write about them, their lives, their rhetorical abilities, if we leave the comfort of traditional definitions of rhetoric behind, along with the totalizing effects of discursive horizons. Only then, can we attempt to revisit and produce the books we once could not write.

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